METAL HAMMER

GIGS! FESTIVALS! FEUDS! EUROVISION?!

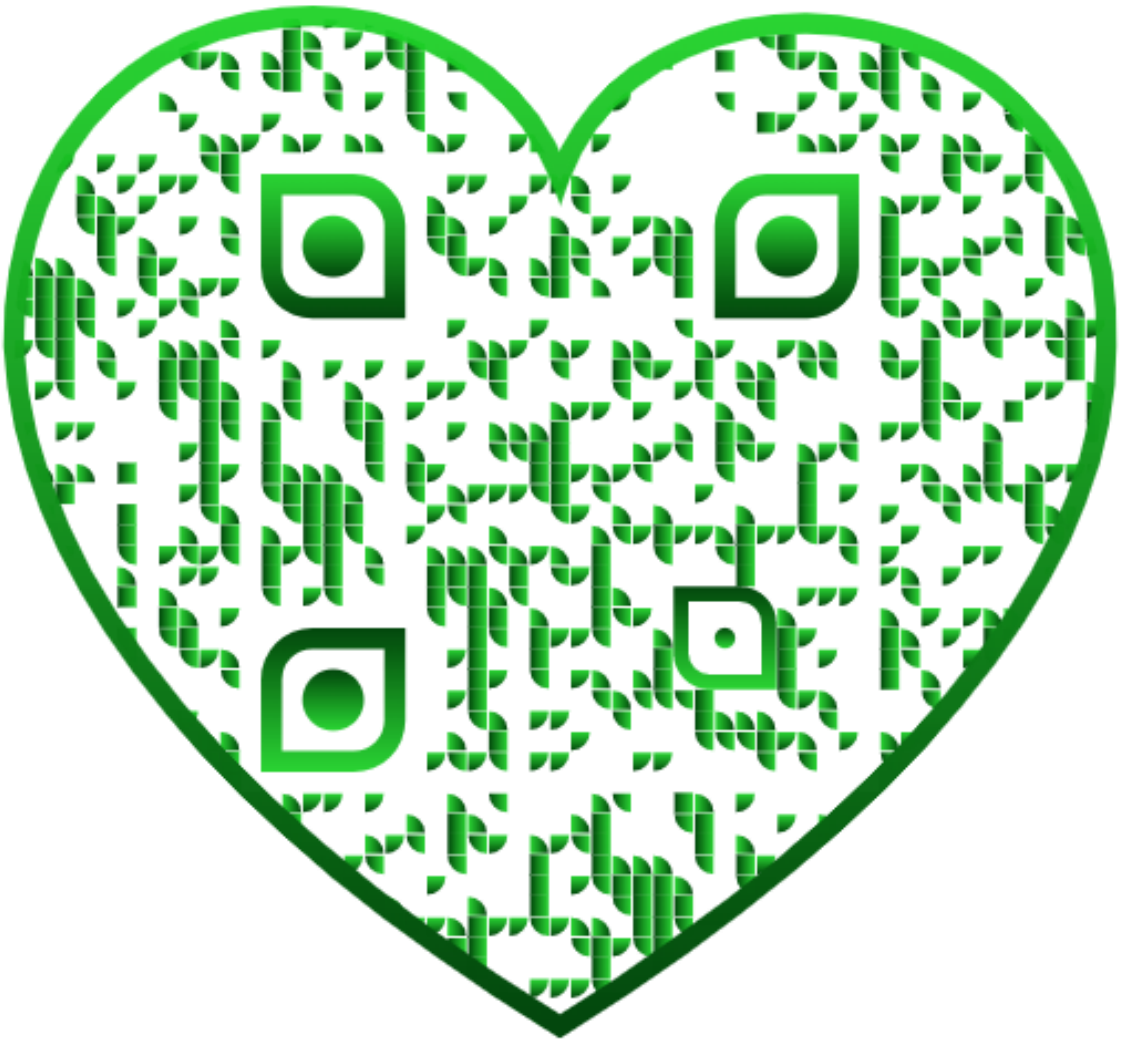
2021

THE BIG REVIEW

THE 50 ALBUMS THAT DEFINED 2021

STARRING IRON MAIDEN – METALLICA – SLIPKNOT – GOJIRA – TRIVIUM – BABYMETAL – EMPLOYED TO SERVE – ARCHITECTS – ALEXI LAIHO
JOEY JORDISON – TETRARCH – LIMP BIZKIT – SPIRITBOX – MASTODON – POWERWOLF – JINJER – BACKXWASH – CHELSEA WOLFE

FUTURE
ISSUE 356



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WAIT, IT'S DECEMBER?!

THAT CAN'T BE right; we're all still processing 2020, aren't we?! 2021 might not have been quite the insane clusterfuck of a year that its predecessor was, but it was still one of world-shifting political events, high emotional stakes and, yes, a discourse still dominated by the pandemic. How lucky, then, that here in the UK we were able to see the return of gigs, festivals and some vague sense of normality to the music scene, even if the impacts of COVID and Brexit still loom large over our industry. Oh, and then there was the *ridiculous* roll call of amazing albums released this year (more on that in our mega critics' poll on p.64).

Beyond that, there's been all sorts of wild shit going on. Corey Taylor beefing with Machine Gun Kelly? Sure. Rock ruling Eurovision? Why not? Nu metal officially becoming cool again?! Hell yes!

We lost some true legends this year. The likes of Joey Jordison, Alexi Laiho and LG Petrov helped build our world as we know and love it today. We also saw the industry shaken by the wave of allegations brought forward against Marilyn Manson. Accountability in metal is vital if the genre is to be the inclusive, welcoming place it prides itself on being, and there will be more difficult conversations to be had from hereon in.

We promise to continue playing our part, and thank you for your amazing support in 2021. Be safe over the festive period, and we'll see you on the other side.

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MEET THE BAND

LOUISE BROCK
ART EDITOR
It takes a genius to convert any Editor's hairbrained ideas and awful cover idea sketches into something beautiful, yet Louise manages it every single issue. Not least with this month's spectacular effort, managing to cram 22 *Hammer* favourites onto one epic cover. Nice.

DANNII LEIVERS
WRITER
Dannii is one of the first people we turn to when we want someone to chat to a young, exciting metal band, so who better to shoot the shit with bruising Portland metalcore ragers Dying Wish, for this month's New Noise? Their story is as scintillating as their music.

MATT MILLS
WRITER
There's not much in this game Matt can't turn his hand to – just have a look at some of the other stuff he's up to this month for evidence – but trying to summarise Slipknot's mammoth Cali stadium show in 800 measly words was a serious undertaking. Fair play.

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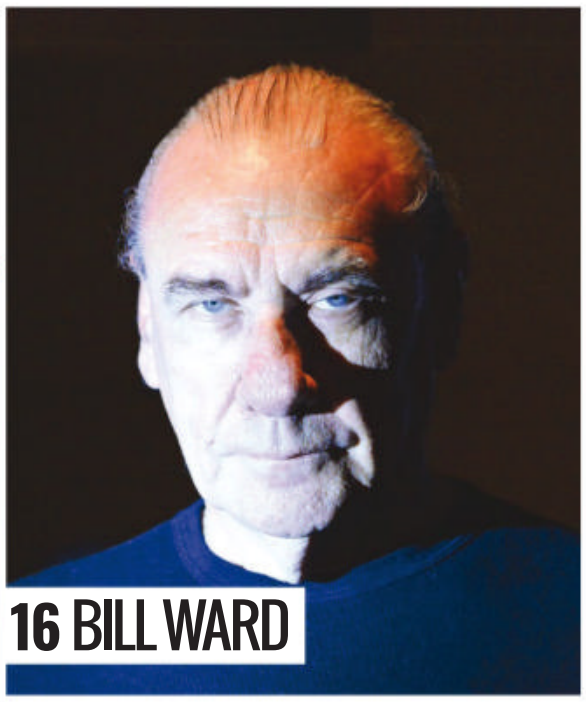

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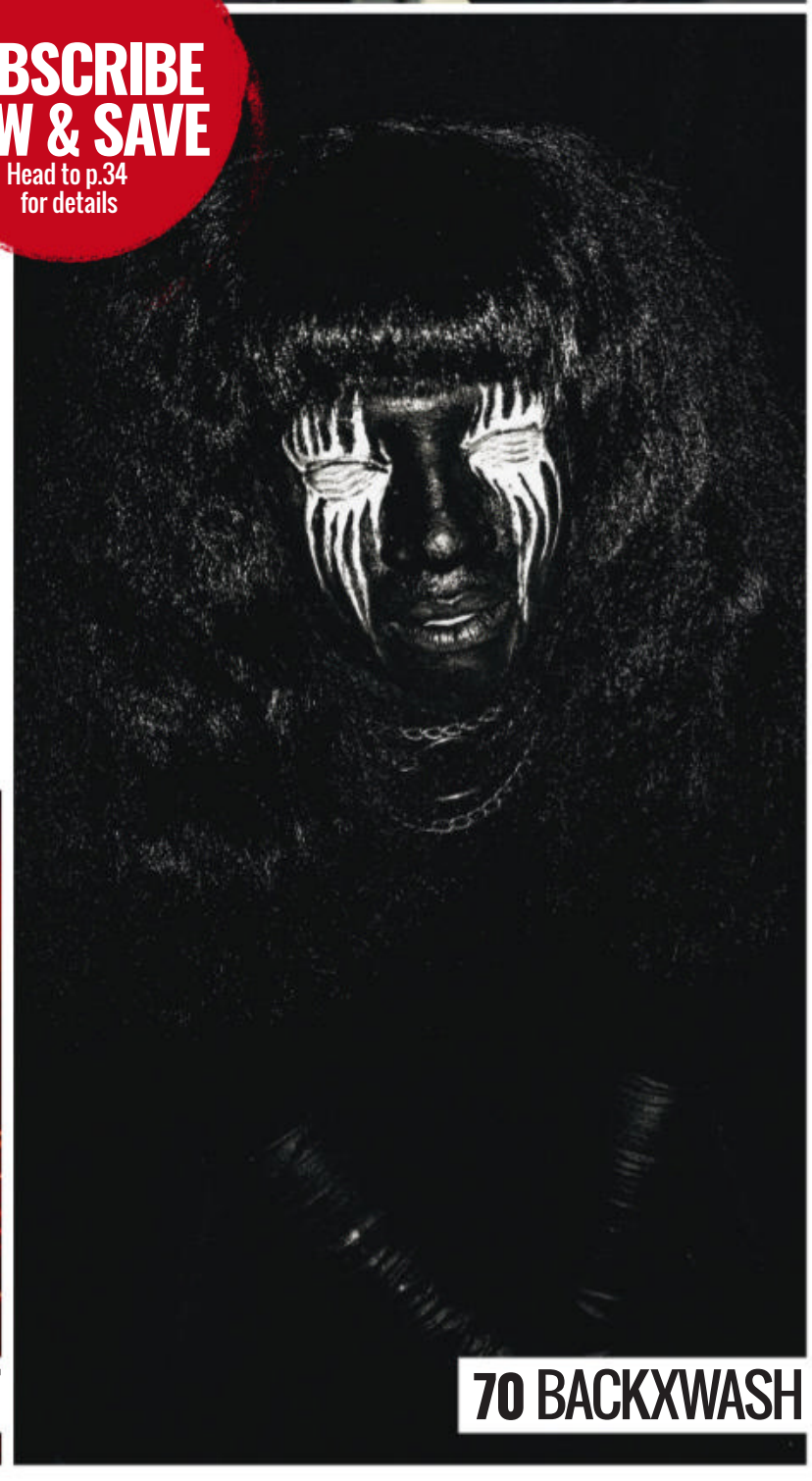

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THE BIG PICTURE

FAMILY REUNION

DANNY WIMMER PRESENTS/ANA MASSARD

IT WAS THE perfect end to a US festival season that many thought wouldn't be possible. Metallica, metal's biggest ever band, playing their biggest ever album, in full, in front of tens of thousands of people at Daytona Beach's humongous, four-day festival extravaganza, Welcome To Rockville.

The Black Album set, top and tailed by a sprinkling of other Metallica classics, capped off a celebratory weekend that also saw voraciously received sets by the likes of Slipknot, Rob Zombie, Disturbed, Lamb Of God, Mudvayne, Mastodon and, er, Metallica, who played another set of entirely different songs on the Friday night. Oh, and the Brass Against singer peed on a dude. So there was that.

"What a crazy cool way to end the festival run of '21," said Lars Ulrich after Metallica's set. "Thank you for joining from near and far, and bringing your loud voices, abundant energy and engaging attitudes!"

How the pandemic will continue to affect the music industry as 2022 looms is anyone's guess, but if nothing else, 2021 will always be the year that live music came back with a vengeance.

"Let's do this again real fuckin' soon!" added Lars.

We couldn't agree more, chap.

A great man, and
a great friend

MALCOLM DOME 1955-2021

The rock and metal world pays tribute to one of music's most influential journalists

WORDS: DAVE EVERLEY • PICTURE: WILL IRELAND

IN 1981, TWO young British music journalists, Malcolm Dome and Brian Harrigan, published a book titled *Encyclopedia Metallica*, a slim but definitive account of a genre that had first emerged just over a decade earlier. A few months later, a young Danish-born NWOBHM aficionado and aspiring drummer launched a band whose name mirrored the second half of the book's title. The drummer was Lars Ulrich and the band were Metallica.

Lars has never confirmed whether he borrowed the name from the book, either consciously or subconsciously. "I'm sure it was just a coincidence," Malcolm himself said with a look in his eye that suggested it was anything but. But there was no bitterness on his part – Malcolm's staunch cheerleading of Metallica from their very early days played an undeniable part in their eventual global success.

Malcolm's death on October 29, 2021 at the age of 66 robbed rock and metal journalism of one of its most influential, knowledgeable and entertaining writers. Over a career that spanned more than 40 years, he was a tireless cheerleader for the genre he loved, writing about the acts he respected, admired and occasionally loathed. The list of bands and musicians he crossed paths with reads like a Who's Who of rock and metal: Iron Maiden, Guns N' Roses, Judas Priest, members of Led Zeppelin and Black Sabbath and countless more, many of whom he was on first name terms with.

"Words cannot express how sorry I feel to hear about the passing of Malcolm Dome," said Ozzy Osbourne after news of his death was announced. Iron Maiden posted their own tribute on Twitter, calling Malcolm "fearless, intrepid, passionate and forthright as a journalist and latterly a broadcaster. We respected him immensely."

"HE WAS ONE OF THE FIRST JOURNALISTS TO *GET* METAL"

TONY IOMMI

Yet it was Malcolm's support of new and emerging bands that made him such a pivotal figure in the rock and metal world. Metallica weren't the only group to benefit from his support: he was among the first journalists to write about, among others, Mötley Crüe, Venom, Bon Jovi, Paradise Lost, Anthrax, Celtic Frost and GN'R. "RIP rock journalist & friend. We'll miss you," wrote Slash on Twitter.

Malcolm's career began in the late 70s on the weekly music magazine *Record Mirror*. But it was as one of the key writers on *Kerrang!* in the 80s, then the bible of heavy metal, that he became such an important figure within the rock and metal scene – his byline indicated an article that was worth reading, a band that was worth checking out, or both. Yet he was also utterly unafraid of letting even the bands he liked know in the frankest terms when they'd misstepped or screwed up, whether in print or in person. More than one musician can attest to being berated by Malcolm at an aftershow party for releasing a duff album or playing a lazy gig.

The subsequent years saw him writing for an array of publications, including a stint on the UK version of *Metal Hammer* in the late 80s, as well as authoring books on everyone from AC/DC to Nirvana and helping launch UK radio station Total Rock Radio. For the last 20-plus years, he was a key part of the writing team on *Metal Hammer* and its sister titles *Classic Rock* and *Prog*, as well as a fixture on countless music documentaries.

Following his death, several musicians posted their tributes and memories on social media. "Malcolm was a lovely guy, he interviewed me many times and was always positive about the music," said Black Sabbath guitarist Tony Iommi. "He was one of the first journalists to totally *get* metal."

"A legendary rock journalist that we crossed paths with many times during our career," wrote Opeth's Mikael Åkerfeldt. "A great guy and a rock oracle in many ways."

"Malcolm had dedicated his life to rock music and its history, and he had done this more thoroughly and adeptly than probably any other person I know," wrote former Celtic Frost/current Triptykon frontman Thomas Gabriel Fischer. "He was an inspiration to me, a supporter and a critic, an indescribably unique individual, and a very dear friend. I will miss him terribly."

One of the most touching tributes came from Lars Ulrich, acknowledging the part Malcolm played in Metallica's career. "Not only was Malcolm an incredible talent who helped guide my relationship with heavy music, but he was also a great person. Today, I'm thinking of the fun, memorable times we spent together back in the day."

Ironically, Malcolm wouldn't have read any of these tributes – he was a stubborn social media refusenik. And even if he *had* seen them, he would have waved them off, too modest to be bothered with the fuss. Tellingly, when Metallica personally invited Malcolm to attend their induction into the Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame in 2009, he politely declined, preferring to remain rooted in his regular spot in fabled London drinking den the Crobar than hobnob at a glitzy awards ceremony on the other side of the Atlantic.

There's no Music Journalist Hall Of Fame, but if there were, Malcolm would be in it. He would dismiss the suggestion, but he played just as important a part in building the rock and metal scene as any of the bands he wrote about. Without him, the world would have been a much quieter place.

COULD YOU TAKE JASON MOMOA IN AN ARM WRESTLE?

Chris Jericho is Fozzy's frontman, and he's here to grapple your questions about Hollywood smackdowns and 80s hairstyles to the ground

WORDS: STEPHEN HILL • PICTURE: SPEEDY RUIZ

JUST GETTING CHRIS Jericho to stay still for five minutes is something of an achievement. The pro-wrestling legend-turned-metal singer is a busy man; not only is he still taking bumps in AEW, he's just finished up work on the eighth album from his band Fozzy, which he predicts will see the light of day during some point in 2022, plus he's got irons in various writing, acting and podcasting fires. But he's not so snowed under that he can't spare the time to grapple with your questions about outdoor nudity, the art of the mullet and saving Paul McCartney from ninjas.

What is the weirdest thing you've ever been asked to sign?
Michael Prior (Facebook)

"Probably a baby. That always comes to mind. When people get tattoos of where you signed your name, that's always pretty surprising. You do a signing and the person you've signed comes back round and they've got it tattooed, that's commitment there. But the baby always springs to mind, it was screaming and crying. Pretty sure they didn't get it tattooed, though."

How is the new Fozzy album shaping up?
Colin Bromley (Facebook)

"It's done. It's one of those things, we, as I'm sure a lot of bands did, took the time during lockdown to get the record finished. We were calling it 'Chinese Fozzocracy' for a bit, because it was taking so long. The first vocal tracks were done in May 2019 and I doubt it'll come out before May 2022, so that's three years right there. There will probably be another video before the album comes out."

How difficult was it to shoot the rollercoaster-themed video for *Sane*?
@Chillin4Reallin

"It was [Fozzy guitarist] Rich Ward's idea. We filmed it on the fastest wooden rollercoaster in America. That means it shakes you around a lot more, it was all bam-bam-bam-bam-bam, so I'm sat there and I've got to sell myself and be all cool as I'm jolting around. We did six takes, two of which didn't work because of technical problems, but once that train leaves the station you gotta do the whole fucking ride. If you watch it back there are a couple of times where you only see four members of Fozzy and not five, because one of our guys couldn't take it. There were a lot of green faces around. Some vomit was expelled, shall we say. But it was worth it because no one has ever done anything like that before."

Fozzy: coasting along nicely

I met you after a show once and I couldn't speak. Who have you met that has reduced you to gibbering idiocy?
Rebecca Cook (Facebook)

"The first time I met James Hetfield, which was weird because I was in my early 30s. I just went on about, 'Thank you for the music, thank you for the lyrics', like an idiot. I did the same to Paul McCartney. It was at a Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame dinner and he was walking past me and I said, 'Hey Paul, if you get attacked by the ninjas, just know I've got your back.' He looked at me like, 'What are you talking about?' Later on, a load of people were trying to get pictures with him while he was at the buffet and I went over and said, 'Hey, just let me know if you need me to get you out of here' and he said, 'Who are you, man? Are you a security guard? Listen, if I have any trouble with the

INSET: ADRIENNE BEACCO

Chris Jericho: he grew out his mullet, but we still love him

“I APPRECIATE A GOOD MULLET”

Nice jacket, Chris... but needs more bling

"WE CALLED THE NEW ALBUM 'CHINESE FOZZOCRACY'"

ninjas, I'll let you know, OK?' And all I could think was, 'He remembers me! I'm the ninja guy!"

Could you take down Jason Momoa in an arm-wrestling contest?
Darius Ramsey (email)
"Oh, easily, easily! I know the secret to arm wrestling – it was taught to me by an arm-wrestling champion nearly 30 years ago. No one really knows it, it's a good secret… but I can't tell you because it is such a secret. But if you can arrange the Momoa vs Jericho arm-wrestling, match I will beat him. You can sort that, right? He's a metal guy, go get him, *Metal Hammer*. You'll figure it out."

When was the last time you were completely naked outdoors?
David Long (Facebook)
"In Canada that was a big thing when we were teenagers, just to see if you could take it. That actually might be the last time. There's really not very many reasons to be naked outdoors in this day and age."

If The Big 4 were wrestlers, who would be Metallica, who would be Slayer, who would be Megadeth, who would be Anthrax, and why?
Ross Drinkwater (Facebook)
"These questions are always kinda weird for me. Metallica would be whoever is currently the champion. Whoever is number one would be Metallica, that's all I know."

What's is your favourite Fozzy album that you worked on?
@JamieRenee92478
"You always go through phases. Obviously every band says their new record is the best. I'm waiting for the band that says their new album is the third best in their catalogue. But our new record is, so it's up there. *Judas* is really good as well, but if you wanna go back further then *Sin And Bone* is probably my favourite. There's a 14-minute-long song called *Storm The Beaches* right out of the pages of *Keeper Of The Seven Keys* or *Rime Of The Ancient Mariner*. It's the sort of song we'd never attempt now, but I'm glad we did it."

I'm trying to convince my friends about the genius of Helloween, but they're having none of it. Can you help me out?
Ben Davey (Facebook)
"Oh my god! Helloween are one of the best bands ever! One of my Top Five… Beatles, Stones, Van Halen, Kiss, they are right there! They invented an entire genre, that's your selling point! In 1985 when *Walls Of Jericho* came out there was no speed metal, there was no power metal – Helloween were the first to combine Metallica's heaviness and speed with the melody of Maiden. They never got bad, no matter the line-up changes, they created so many things that you don't even realise. I could sit you down and point out where they influenced everyone from Avenged to Amon Amarth and beyond."

Which wrestler had the worst taste in music?
Kevin Cousins (Facebook)
"Christian [Cage] was pretty bad. He liked boy bands. He knew all the words to Backstreet Boys songs. I used to say to him, 'Why are you into this dude? You're, like, 30?'. Music is selective but that's when I was like, 'Really?' You go to a boy band concert and you're one of two guys and the rest is chicks. I didn't really get it and I still don't."

What is the one movie you wish you could have acted in?
Louise Livsey (Facebook)
"Pick any of the Christopher Guest movies. They're so great. *Spinal Tap* we watch on the bus – it's a ritual at this point. It's aged really well. Same with *Waiting For Guffman*, same with *Best In Show*, I think that my background in improv would mean I'd fit in really well with some of the crazier stuff. Then any Indiana Jones movie – obviously as a kid I wanted to be the swashbuckler!"

What's the most embarrassing thing you've got in your wardrobe?
Peter Willis (Facebook)
"Nothing embarrasses me, man, I'm in show business! I've got sparkles, spikes, rhinestones, spandex, light-up jackets, hats, make up, studs, gloves, studded jeans, light-up scarves… you name it, man! I've got it all. The only thing that embarrasses me is when I'm wearing something with nothing on it at all. I'm like, 'There's no personality to this! Why am I wearing it?!' Gene Simmons told me years ago that you should always look like a star. I always keep that attitude in my head at all time."

Are we due a mullet revival soon?
Paul Green (Facebook)
"I see it all the time – my son is 18 and he's got friends with mullets. Brian Pillman Jr in AEW has a mullet – there's quite a few out here. I had a one back when they were in style, so I appreciate a good mullet. There were plenty of guys who'd just cut their hair on top, but the guys who spiked it up on top and let it go really long, they're the guys. They really have to put effort into that; I appreciate you if you're putting as much effort into the top as you are the bottom. Kiefer Sutherland in *The Lost Boys* – that's the perfect mullet."

FOZZY ARE CURRENTLY ON TOUR IN THE UK

XAVI TORRENT/GETTY

A CRUSHING SALVO OF
BLACK METAL MAJESTY

behemoth

IN ABSENTIA DEI

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THE SLAYLIST

MICHAEL POULSEN

From old-school death metal to the new generation of punk rock, Volbeat's frontman has got it all covered

WORDS: MATT MILLS • PICTURE: ROSS HALFIN

Michael Poulson ponders a duet with Barney Greenway... *iiiiinteresting*

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"I'M NOT BEING really nerdy about the songs I've picked; I've just looked at my iPod and seen the last 10 songs that I've listened to. I'm a **HYPOCRISY** fan; I remember discovering them in the late 90s, when the Swedish death metal scene just exploded. I bought the first Hypocrisy vinyl and got the upside-down cross they have on the back of it tattooed on my arm. I think I was 16. One of their new songs is *Chemical Whore*, which sounds a lot like the old Hypocrisy. It's got a lot of melody and it's pretty heavy, and it's got that signature Hypocrisy guitar sound.

"**MANIC STREET PREACHERS** are probably one of my favourite pop rock bands and *Complicated Illusions* is really stuck in my head. After a few drives in my car, my daughter, who's four-and-a-half years old, started singing it too. James Dean Bradfield is such a great songwriter and a very underrated guitar player. On the latest **IRON MAIDEN** album, *Senjutsu*, there's a song called *The Parchment*. The last good Maiden record, to my ear, was *Brave New World*, so I didn't have many expectations. But, that song has everything Iron Maiden: a great intro and the guitar playing sounds so inspired; it's crazy! If this is gonna be their last record, they're going out with a big bang!

"**CHECKMATES, LTD.** are an old band from the late 60s. I've known *Love Is All We Have To Give* since I was a kid, but suddenly it's shown up again in one of my playlists. That song gives me goosebumps every time I hear it. Check it out if you don't know it! *Burnin' Train* is from the newest **BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN** record [*Letter To You*]. It has so many strong songs, but *Burnin' Train* was one where, when I heard it, I really wished I'd written it.

"IF *SENJUTSU* IS IRON MAIDEN'S LAST RECORD, THEY'RE GOING OUT WITH A BIG BANG"

"*Headless Cross* is my favourite **BLACK SABBATH** album and also possibly my favourite heavy rock album. The title track is a song I could listen to every day for the rest of my life. I think Tony Martin's an overlooked Sabbath frontman. I know there are other fans like me who worship those albums, but they don't get mentioned enough; it's still Tony Iommi's songwriting and guitar sound, and he's written so many classic albums and songs.

"I discovered **IDLES** while I was watching *Peaky Blinders*, which has such a great soundtrack. I don't remember what song it was, but I knew I had to figure out who that band was. I got the record that had *Great* on, *Joy As An Act Of Resistance*, and I'm a fan now. They're one of the most interesting bands in modern times; I'll be keeping an eye on them. **CADAVER**, an old death metal band, released a new album, *Edder And Bile*, half a year ago and I'm really crazy about the opening track, *Morgue Ritual*. I remember the glory days of death metal, when they were a part of the scene, and they were very original. The new record has a sound you can't really compare to anything. Plus, the drumming is very impressive.

"*Enemy Of The Music Business*, together with *Harmony Corruption*, is my favourite **NAPALM DEATH** album, but they have made so many great records. I have so much respect for that band and Barney [Greenway, vocals] is one of my good friends. We've talked about one day doing a project together, so that'll be interesting. I don't know what we'd do: a duet with Barney on vocals? Ha ha! *Necessary Evil* is so catchy and that's what's interesting about Napalm; they can be blasting away then suddenly switch into something catchy.

"Talking of Barney, let's do his old band, **BENEDICTION**. I see their latest album [*Scriptures*] as a comeback album. When the record came out, I felt like a young dude again. The production was really good, [singer] Dave Ingram sounded better than ever and so many songs take you back to classics like *The Grand Leveller*. One song I kept listening to was *The Blight At The End*; there are great Benediction signatures in that. Hopefully I'll be able to watch them this coming year."

VOLBEAT'S NEW ALBUM, *SERVANT OF THE MIND*, IS OUT NOW VIA EMI

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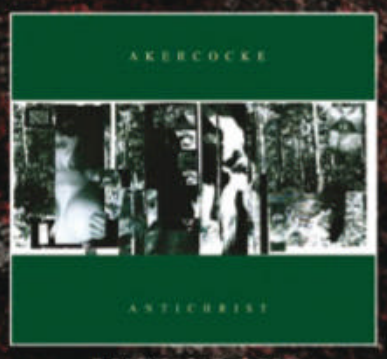

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LIFE LESSONS

BILL WARD

Black Sabbath's legendary original drummer talks high times, low points and rekindled friendships

WORDS: RICH HOBSON • PICTURE: CHRIS WAGNER

THE MAN BEHIND the kit for some of metal's most influential and formative records, Bill Ward's tenure with Black Sabbath saw the birth of heavy metal as a genre and the band's ascension into globe-conquering superstars. A battle with alcoholism in the 1980s gave way to a more holistic lifestyle that has kept him going in the decades since, returning to Sabbath for spells in the 90s and 2000s whilst also branching out into a solo career. Not short of a few pearls of wisdom, we spoke to the heavy metal icon to find the path to enlightenment…

DON'T TAKE YOURSELF SO FUCKING SERIOUSLY

"It helps to travel through life with a modicum of humility, keeping your feet on the ground. In my youth I was a lot more serious, but as you travel through all these different phases you realise the simple things are a lot more enjoyable than trying to figure out how it all works. The time I spend with my grandkids these days is more important than any finger pointing I might have done in my 20s, 30s or even 40s."

BECOMING GREAT MEANS LEARNING AS MUCH AS YOU CAN

"I was brought up by at least 200 drummers, but I always credit Gene Krupa – I love his sloppiness and brilliance. As a child I listened to Buddy Rich too, Louie Bellson, Elvin Jones; I listened to a lot of guys and I was brought up on jazz, English pop music like Brian Bennett with The Shadows… my god! I remember hearing Charles Connor on *Good Golly Miss Molly* and being completely blown away. You can't believe the *balls* on that record."

THE RIGHT BAND CAN CHANGE EVERYTHING

"The Beatles released *Love Me Do* around 1962 and then soon after Birmingham had Johnny Neal and The Starliners; real rock'n'rollers influenced by the music of the 50s. It was the wave of Liverpool bands that came along that kicked everybody's ass and all the big cities had to adapt and make their own scene. When we finished Black Sabbath rehearsals at the Aston community centre, I had feelings inside telling me a few things; I knew we were different and what we'd made would cause a few problems, but also earn us great affection and I'm so fucking proud of that."

YOU ONLY GROW BY TAKING RISKS

"I love what we did in Black Sabbath. We took risks – we dared to move away from our slamming stuff and play acoustic parts. We might then follow that with *Symptom Of The Universe* but back then we were always stretching further."

TECHNICAL ECSTASY MIGHT HAVE BEEN BLACK SABBATH'S BRAVEST RECORD

"Everybody was growing – sometimes sideways, but we did what we had to do. *Technical Ecstasy* was a great album because we didn't insist on being what we had been on the first three albums. We hadn't stopped touring and still continued to make records – we put everything we had at the time into whatever record we worked on. I thought *The Gypsy* was incredible and *Back Street Kids* had some fantastic groove to it too."

THE MORE YOU SHARE, THE MORE IN-TUNE YOU ARE WITH OTHER PEOPLE

"Black Sabbath were so tight, we'd have the same dreams. It happens when you're in a room transferring things to each other musically all day, so we'd end up having similar dreams. One of the dreams we had was being visited by a priest, or a spectre and I just saw that as a guardian angel."

BLACK SABBATH WERE EVERYTHING TO ME

"One of my biggest regrets was I sold a beautiful house, because we needed to raise money to pay for the album *Heaven And Hell*. Getting a big house and farm after growing up in Aston felt like a big deal. But the band came before everything else and we needed money at that point to move on to the next thing."

NEVER FORGET YOUR ROOTS

"The first thing I learned growing up was watch your back! I'm from fucking Aston man, it was beautiful but you could bump into some rough characters, and I did. Everybody learned either how to scrap or run really fast. I love everything about the Aston I knew – I've not been back since 2016, but we'd planned to visit in November to do Armistice with my family."

STAND UP FOR YOURSELF AND LISTEN TO YOUR TRUTH

"I learned this one from hard knocks. I had to listen to myself more, as opposed to having knee-jerk responses of 'Yes', 'OK' and 'No problem.' I had to find out what I thought I could do before I said yes and what felt right inside – that's been more important over the last 25 years in my decision making."

BE QUICK TO RECOGNISE LOVE, BE RESPECTFUL FOR ALL THAT EXISTED BEFORE YOUR ARRIVED

"It's taken me a long time to learn how to love, particularly the love of my fellow man and woman, but I think I do better these days in being able to pay attention. With animals it's a no-brainer – I became vegan in 1986 and detest any violence against animals. I don't want to be in disharmony, or live in anger and fear of the world we've been given."

ALWAYS BE ACCOUNTABLE AND PRACTISE HONESTY

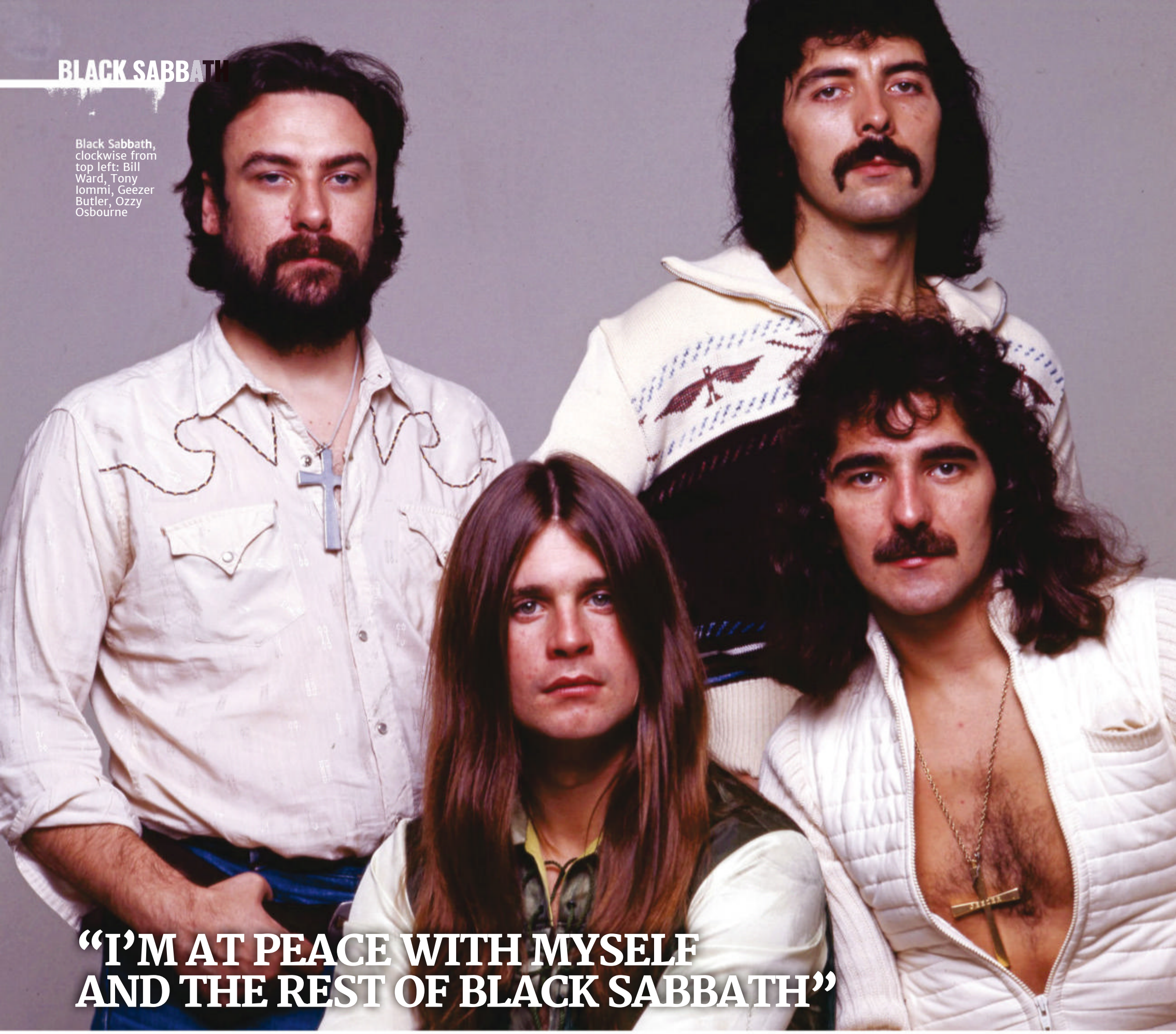
"I have an attitude of gratitude so far as being able to play in a great band and having done so since I was 14. I used to do weddings and sit-ins as early as 10, so I've been doing this for a *long* time and I'm enormously grateful for that. I just showed up and tried to do the right thing."

LIFE SOMETIMES GIVES US A SECOND CHANCE

"In 1984 I had lost *everything* – I didn't even have a pair of pants. I was wearing somebody else's! I crawled out of an alley after heavy alcohol abuse and realised I was killing myself. It became about rebuilding myself and strengthening my body. A couple years later I stopped eating meat, period. There was a lot of hard work to be done, but one of the best things that ever happened for me was getting to do the [Black Sabbath] *Reunion* album [in 1998]. I thought that part of my life was gone and I was really sad about it, so ▶

"I LOST EVERYTHING. I WAS WEARING SOMEONE ELSE'S PANTS"

Bill Ward: a bona fide legend and pretty damn zen



Black Sabbath, clockwise from top left: Bill Ward, Tony Iommi, Geezer Butler, Ozzy Osbourne

"I'M AT PEACE WITH MYSELF AND THE REST OF BLACK SABBATH"

getting to come back in and kick some ass really took care of that."

AFTER EVERYTHING, I STILL LOVE MY BLACK SABBATH BANDMATES

"I love the you-know-what out of those guys. I've come through the angry bits that happened in 2012 and arrived in a place of being at peace with myself and with them. I'm glad we did what we did and often go down memory lane with the early work we did in Copenhagen and the Reeperbahn in Hamburg. I love those guys and all the imperfections that go with that. It's a great feeling, having come as far as we have and I'm happy just being able to write or talk to them if I want to."

GETTING OLD AIN'T FOR WIMPS

"What I've learned growing up is that you should enjoy everything you can do. I'm serious about that – stuff like going to the bathroom properly, being able to walk if you can – enjoy that as much as you possibly can because there might come a point as you get older that things start to change. Doing anything after 65 or 70, everything becomes tougher. When something happens it can be depressing, so in those times you need courage to look after yourself, patience with yourself and for those who have faith, finding that to help them as well. You need those tools for later life."

YOUR OUTLOOK ON LIFE BECOMES DIMINISHED IF YOU'RE NOT TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF

"I used to be an avid walker, but sadly since 2019 I started getting neuropathy and that slowed my walking. I've been finding other ways to stretch and stay strong, using things like a Bodyblade and medicine balls to exercise. You can't become sedentary."

ENJOY ART IN ALL FORMS – RECOGNISE THE SUFFERING AND HARD WORK THAT GOES INTO MAKING IT

"Art is such an elemental force in our lives that it's easy to take it for granted. I fucking loved my old radio show and would love to do it again some day. I went out of my way to find and break bands, like Today Is The Day and Disbelief. I always keep an eye out for whatever my favourite musicians are doing too, like Dave Lombardo or Gene Hoglan."

HEAVY METAL IS GOING TO MARS

"So long as these guys keep kicking the crap out of everyone, we're going to be just fucking fine man. Heavy metal is being reinvented all the time and we've got great musicians. One of the things I find outstanding is the bass players and drummers in heavy metal – I can't believe how these guys play now."

BLACK SABBATH'S *TECHNICAL ECSTASY* REMASTERED BOX SET IS OUT NOW VIA BMG

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MESHUGGAH

World exclusive: the tech-metal visionaries lift the lid on their upcoming ninth album

WORDS: RICH HOBSON

FOR 30 YEARS, Meshuggah have existed on metal's cutting edge. Having spent three years writing, rehearsing and reworking material for their ninth record, the Swedish band show no signs of dialling back their ambitions. While they remain coy about releasing too many details – the album title and release date are still being kept under lock and key – *Hammer* caught up with drummer Tomas Haake and guitarist Mårten Hagström to find out just how deep the rabbit hole goes.

What's been the biggest change in the world of Meshuggah since the last album?
Marten: "Halfway through the touring cycle of *The Violent Sleep Of Reason*, Fredrik [Thordendal, guitars] took the time out to build his studio and focus on trying to get his solo album done. When we got off tour and went into album writing mode, we talked to Fredrik and let him know that we wanted him to play a couple of leads on this album. That was his part in the production – he was going to be the lead guitar player and we need him to be that wherever we felt that the songs demanded a proper Fredrik Thordendal Meshuggah lead… but we'd be lying if we said there hasn't been a difference since he took time out."

Was there a specific starting point for the new album, beyond just, 'We need to make a record'?
Tomas: "I think the real starting point was a couple months after our last tour, so around October 2019. We'd kinda slowly started already back in 2018, though it wasn't until around October 2019 that we started going more all-in, working four, five or six days a week, four to eight hours a day. By that point *The Violent Sleep Of Reason* was already more than three years old, so we definitely started feeling the pressure to write new stuff!

On a scale of *Obzen* to *Catchthirtythree*, how off the wall is it sounding?
Tomas: "Well, 'off the wall' isn't really how I would describe it… Sound-wise we were going for a warmer sound this time around, less harsh mids and highs in the guitars and less abrasive cymbals etc. Getting older, you feel like 'I wanna be able to enjoy this' and not just be mauled and run over."

What's the least Meshuggah-sounding moment on the album?
Marten: "When you work on an album for three years, it becomes hard to think of something that doesn't fit into our realm. There's spots on the album where we're further away from the core of our past output, but saying there are least Meshuggah-sounding moments is admitting to failure. We want to be able to put our stamp on *anything* when we venture into music territories."

There's an insane amount of anticipation for new Meshuggah. Does that add pressure, or can you just block it out?
Tomas: "I think we have always felt that if there's pressure on us, it comes from ourselves in the band. Whenever we present new music to each other in the band, that's kinda the crucible or trial by fire that the music needs to pass. Once the material gets the thumbs up from the other bandmates, that's all we can do. We can't be wondering too much about what we think the fans might want and whether they feel they wish to hear 'fast this, quirky that, tune lower, impossible beats please'… So, we don't need to block it out as it's always blocked out!"

You got a Grammy nomination in 2018 for *Clockworks*. Were you sticking pins in a voodoo doll of Mastodon after they beat you?
Tomas: "Ha ha ha! No way, we all love Mastodon and they deserve the hell out of that win! We were touring at the time so we couldn't attend the ceremony, but if we'd been there we would've been the first bunch to congratulate and tip our hats to them awesome Atlantans!"

THE NEW ALBUM IS DUE OUT IN 2022 VIA NUCLEAR BLAST

Meshuggah: don't expect to be "mauled and run over", but probably don't hold your breath for ballads either

THE FACTS

ALBUM:
9

PRODUCER:
Rickard Bengtsson/ Meshuggah

STUDIO:
Sweet Spot Studios, Sweden

EXPECT:
Meshuggah embracing their prog-tinged tendencies for a slower, more melodic approach to experimentalism

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THE STORY BEHIND

BODIES
BY DROWNING POOL

It was one of the great moshpit anthems of the early 00s, yet the New Orleans metallers' biggest hit was overshadowed by tragedy

WORDS: RICH HOBSON • PICTURE: HAYLEY MADDEN/GETTY

DROWNING POOL'S *BODIES* just might be *the* ultimate metal club anthem. Even 20 years on from release, the song maintains a near-ubiquitous presence in metal clubs, bars and gig playlists around the planet. An unabashed love letter to mosher culture, the song arose during the golden age of nu metal, proof positive that any new band could fly from obscurity to stardom with the right song. Only, Drowning Pool never really saw themselves as a nu metal band.

"We actually always wanted to be Pantera," says bassist Stevie Benton. "By the time our first album had come out bands like Limp Bizkit and Korn were popular, so when *Bodies* became really popular so the logic was that we also were nu metal like Limp Bizkit."

It was Pantera that lured guitarist CJ Pierce and drummer Mike Luce away from their home scene in New Orleans in 1996, leaving behind "mostly blues and a few death metal bands" for the Pantera-inspired groove metal scene that had arisen in Dallas. There, the pair connected with Stevie and Drowning Pool formed as an instrumental three-piece. They later found the missing ingredient in vocalist Dave Williams, the singer providing the requisite snarls to complement their tight grooves, but also crucially bringing with him a gregarious party animal vibe that cemented their reputation as a killer live band.

"Dave was a real firecracker," Stevie adds. "You just never knew what was going to happen. The life of every party to the point where if there *wasn't* a party, he would create one just to become the life of it."

As a four-piece, Drowning Pool began honing the material that would eventually become their debut album, *Sinner*, while playing any open spot they could find in Texas or neighbouring states Louisiana and Oklahoma. In the early days the band's interests were less about global conquest and more how they could fund their party lifestyle.

"We had this huge, well thought-out plan… for how to get a free bar tab," Stevie says. "As things progressed and we built up a crowd we started getting paid for gigs. Of course then we would see this thing where a promoter would come along like, 'Hey, I was going to pay you $200, but you guys drank your bar tab and then drank another $300, so you owe me $100."

Even when they made a loss, they were having the time of their lives. In turn, the crowds were growing at a rate where the band had moved from playing to "the bartenders and their girlfriends" to 500 or 600 people a night. It was here that the band first got the idea to write an ode to the wild crowds they would play to.

"We played shows where people were just *everywhere*," Stevie says. "Climbing on the stage, into the rafters and diving off… That's where this 'let the bodies hit the floor' idea first came in."

"We had this one friend that always tried to stage dive even if there were only like nine people in the crowd, which guaranteed he was gonna hit the floor pretty much every time," CJ recalls. "One time the guy jumped off and shattered his knee in four places!"

Based around a riff CJ had written while the band were still a three-piece, the song existed in various demos before taking its final shape.

"Dave already had the idea with the count-in, but there are different early versions of *Bodies* where we didn't know quite what to say," Stevie says. "There's versions where he's just making things up between numbers. There's one where he pretends to answer a telephone, for whatever reason!"

Drowning Pool ultimately got signed by Wind-Up Records, home of post-grunge superstars Creed. Though ironically, it wasn't the song for which they became best known that grabbed the label's attention.

"We'd recorded this song *Tear Away* that local radio stations really liked and ended up playing lots," Stevie says. "But when Wind-Up heard the full record, they said they were going with *Bodies* as the first single instead. Straight away I thought, 'That's it, our career is ruined before we've even started.' Shows what I fucking know!"

RELEASED ON MAY 14, 2001, *Bodies* steadily climbed its way up the charts, ultimately peaking in the US when it hit No.6. Not coincidentally, the song's ascent up the charts coincided with Drowning Pool's appearance on the 2001 Ozzfest tour, where they joined the likes of Black Sabbath, Slipknot and Linkin Park on a trek across North America.

"Sharon Osbourne ended up moving us up the bill of Ozzfest while we were on the tour," CJ says. "We did the Jägermeister tour straight after, then Music As A Weapon with Disturbed. These were huge arena crowds, but every night we'd go out and do *Bodies* and you'd see the whole place go up."

With heavy radio and MTV play, *Bodies* looked like elevating Drowning Pool to metal's top tier. Yet the events of 9/11 halted the song's ascent – US radio conglomerate Clear Channel added it to a list of songs unofficially banned in the wake of the attacks on the Twin Towers, deeming its lyrics inappropriate. In turn, this kickstarted a trend for misinterpreting the song's lyrics to link to acts of violence.

THE FACTS

RELEASED:
2001

ALBUM:
Sinner

PERSONNEL:
Dave Williams (vocals), CJ Pierce (Guitars), Stevie Benton (Bass), Mike Luce (Drums)

HIGHEST CHART POSITION:
6 (US Mainstream Rock charts)

CJ, Mike and Stevie have remained constants in the band since day one

“DAVE WILLIAMS WAS A REAL FIRECRACKER. YOU JUST NEVER KNEW WHAT WAS GOING TO HAPPEN”

STEVIE BENTON

"It's always really frustrated me that people took this song – that was about kids at a rock show – and put all these negative connotations on it," Stevie says. "When Clear Channel just struck it off, they made it seem like there *was* a reason for it to be banned. It took away the ambiguity of the song and people's ability to decide on the meaning for themselves."

Worse was to come. On August 14, 2002, Dave Williams was found dead on the band's tourbus in at a stop off in Manassas, Virginia on that year's Ozzfest. The cause of death was cardiomyopathy, a heart condition that had gone undiagnosed. He was just 30 years old.

"Dave was an incredibly loving guy," CJ says. "His personality really helped people connect with the music and I don't think we'd have got the support we did without him. He loved getting to know people, whether it was fans, other bands or the guys in the bar. To this day, I hang out and watch every band because of what Dave taught me – it's a rock'n'roll show and everybody's there to have a good time."

In November 2002 the band commemorated their fallen bandmate with the documentary *Sinema*, featuring tributes from fans. Proceeds from the movie's sale were set aside to help purchase a retirement home for Dave's parents, something he had told the band was a dream for him.

Though Drowning Pool continued after his death, they spent much of the 2000s in a state of identity crisis, working with a number of other singers (including Soil's Ryan McCombs) until they finally stabilised their line-up with Jasen Moreno in 2012. A local boy who played in other groups when Drowning Pool were starting out, Jasen admits his long-standing relationship with the band – and with Dave Williams in particular – makes *Bodies* a particularly poignant song to play live.

"*Bodies* is my absolute favourite part of the set," Jasen explains. "That song was undeniable when it came out – we all knew that – so being in the position to be onstage singing it with the fans is unreal."

Though *Bodies* has continued to be misinterpreted in the mainstream media from time to time in the two decades since its release (including reports it was used by interrogators at Guantanamo Bay detention camps and was linked to the 2011 shooting of Congresswoman Gabby Giffords), its true meaning has been embraced by the culture that inspired it in the first place.

Played everywhere from clubs, gigs and bars to wrestling shows, MMA tournaments and even in movies, *Bodies* is rightly hailed as a bona fide anthem for metal culture, not just Drowning Pool's biggest song, but one of the all-time great metal club anthems. Unlike so many other bands, however, Drowning Pool don't resent being immediately associated with their big hit.

"I've never really understood that thing where a band doesn't want to play their biggest song live," CJ says. "I'd play *Bodies* five times a night if people really wanted it that bad! I find it really cool when we get young fans coming to a show and saying 'I just got into that song *Bodies* – it's awesome!' because to them it doesn't matter the song is 20 years old, they're hearing it just now for the first time."

"I think that *is* the legacy of *Bodies*," Stevie adds. "Even now, whenever somebody needs a shot of adrenaline and to psych somebody up, that is the go-to song over everything else. It's a shot in the arm that will get you pumped up."

Looking at pretty much any dance-floor at a metal club over the past 20 years, we're inclined to agree.

Dave Williams was the life and soul of every party

TIM MOSENFELDER/GETTY

"ONE TIME A GUY JUMPED OFF THE STAGE AND SHATTERED HIS KNEE IN FOUR PLACES"

CJ PIERCE

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YOUR SHOUT

ROCK REALLY IS DEAD

…and other melodramatic statements, furious demands and pleasant comments you left us this month

METALLICA FOUR-EVER

Four decades of Metallica?! I feel old as old can be, but thank you *Metal Hammer* for that amazing anniversary issue last month [issue #355]. Having Jason in there made it all the better – that line-up will always be *my* Metallica.
James Dysen (email)

Glad to be of service! Any excuse to get Sir Jason of Newsted in the magazine is fine with us. Metallica have done alright, haven't they?!

FIGHT FIRE WITH FIRE

It's good to see Metallica celebrating 40 years, but it'll be six years since *Hardwired… To Self-Destruct* next year. Surely it's time to bring the fire back and stop looking at the past and give us some great Metallica tunes for the now?
Liam Prince (Facebook)

We thought *Hardwired… To Self-Destruct* had some amazing material on it, so the sooner Metallica roll into new album mode, the better for us.

INSURANCE GOD

So Rob Halford, the 'Metal God', is doing commercials for insurance companies now? Wow, rock really is dead. It's over. We're done. Call it now.
Bryan Johnsen (Facebook)

You gotta admit it's a pretty funny ad though, right? Right Bryan? Bryan? BRYAN!

MACHINE BUM SMELLY

How fucking embarrassing that Machine Gun Kelly would get run out of rap by Eminem, then pretend to be a pop punk band and then finally try and get in on the metal world by beefing with Slipknot. Who the fuck does that guy think he is?! Embarrassing shit.
Tom R. Abraham (Facebook)

That whole episode was a little on the bizarre side, wasn't it? It's not like Corey Taylor needs much of an invitation to drop some truth-bombs on people.

Rob Halford: would you insure a second-hand car with this man?

NINETY NINETY WON

All these 1991 anniversaries just go to show how powerful rock was in the 80s and 90s. *The Black Album*, *No More Tears*, *Nevermind*, *Use Your Illusion*…nowadays if a rock band gets a Top 10 album mags like *Metal Hammer* jazz their pants. It really is dead. What happened?
Gavin Lewis (Facebook)

MOANERS LIKE YOU RUINED IT FOR EVERYONE, GAV, THAT'S WHAT! We're kidding, you're actually right; we *do* froth our knickers when rock bands do well now because it *does* feel like it's rarer than it should be. Still, Architects got a No.1 album this year. That was pretty badass, eh?

WE ❤ MASTODON

The Mastodon interview in October's issue (#354) moved me so much. What an unbelievable

#TWEETS

I woke up in a bus bunk this morning. We play a show on Sunday. We are on tour again. Is this real? Is this happening? Hello?
Chris Motionless, Motionless In White
(@ChrisMotionless)

I'm grateful that I'm not hateful. Too much of that floating around these days.
Jacoby Shaddix, Papa Roach
(@JacobyShaddix)

It's 2021 and I am overjoyed to let you know that I will no longer be letting people just enjoy things. The thing you like fucking sucks and I'm here to tell you why, and in great detail. NORMALISE BEING A HATER. BRING BACK HATERS.
Djamila Yasmin, Ithaca
(@djamilayasmine)

Feels nice to announce some shows. It's been ages since someone told me to Come to Brazil.
Wade MacNeil, Gallows/Alexisonfire
(@wade_macneil)

HALFORD: GETTY. METALLICA: PRESS/HERRING & HERRING JINGER: PRESS

Jinjer definitely deserve a cover – no debate there!

journey that band of brothers have had together, and that they're all still making such beautiful music out of it is even more amazing. They're one of the best bands out there, period.
Emma Brown (email)

We love the Mastodon boys, and it's absolutely true that they've had to weather some storms together, to say the very least. And yes, they've given us some truly magnificent music, too.

JINJER SPICE

Glad to see Jinjer on a half-*Metal Hammer* cover (issue #353 bundle edition) but could we get them on a proper *Metal Hammer* cover soon? They're so underrated and need more coverage from the metal media!
Bethan Hards (Facebook)

Well, a bunch of rave reviews and numerous interviews on our part is a pretty good start, we reckon! But yes, Jinjer are, unquestionably, one of the most exciting young metal bands around right now. Watch this space.

BRING ME THE RAGE

Does Tom Morello working with Bring Me The Horizon mean I have to give them a pass now? Because I'm not doing it after that awful vampire bullshit song. Pass.
Jamie Hill (Facebook)

We'll let Oli and the Bring Me The Horizon lads know. They'll be devastated. (Alright, fair's fair: we're not keen on Die4u either, to be honest, but the video is pretty badass).

CHARACTER-BUILDING

Isn't it time we brought Jurgen or Nöel The Tröll back? *Metal Hammer*'s letters pages feel barren without some hi jinx from one of those two silly sods.
George Phillips (email)

Sadly, Nöel refused to be published in *Hammer* after we embraced nu metal again and Jurgen remains AWOL. Rumours abound you can hear the lonely 'AIIIYYYYYYYEEEEEEEE's of a wandering ghost in the early hours around Bergen…

THE BIG DEBATE

Writer Chris Lord recently dissected the legacy of Hollywood bomb *Rock Star*, analysing whether it really was the worst film about rock ever made. Unexpectedly, a lot of you actually… er… came to bat for it?!

HE SAID

"Watch the cameos on Youtube and avoid the rest like the plague. Better yet, reacquaint yourself with *Wayne's World* or *Spinal Tap. Rock Star* is an absolute stinker."

YOU SAID

It was one of the best movies ever, with good actors and wonderful music! Even though Steel Dragon don't exist, they are (they should be) one of my best metal bands!
Mario Cembauer (Facebook)

I loved it! I was there for the filming of the live show in the arena. Got to meet Mark Wahlberg, interview Great White and C.C. Deville, met Blackie Lawless from WASP and got to see them, Great White and Megadeth perform! The movie is a reminder of one of the best days of my life.
David Priest (Facebook)

What are you talking about, *Metal Hammer*? It's a good movie, like *Almost Famous*. If you want to talk about the worst movie, talk about *Rock Of Ages*! When it was on TV, I tried to watch it but turned it off immediately!
Michelle Pounds (Facebook)

No way! It's a fucking mad movie. Great soundtrack too. That Tom Cruise one was absolute balls. And Andre 3000 did nothing to do Hendrix credit.
Steve Barron (Facebook)

Not seen this film, so can't comment on it. However, *This Is Spinal Tap* is awful.
Kirsty Winn (Facebook)

JOIN THE BIG DEBATE AT FACEBOOK.COM/METALHAMMERREADERS

HAMMER STEREO

What's been blowing our office speakers

TRIVIUM
In The Court Of The Dragon
"My album of the year, and quite possibly favourite Trivium album ever"
MERLIN ALDERSLADE
EDITOR

SPIRITBOX
Eternal Blue
"Gorgeous and heavy, this stunning debut ruled my 2021"
ELEANOR GOODMAN
DEPUTY EDITOR

VOICES
Breaking The Trauma Bond
"A sprawling, inflamed quest from the UK's most visionary extreme metal band"
JONATHAN SELZER
REVIEWS EDITOR

MASTODON
Hushed And Grim
"Another incredible album from these guys. My favourite of theirs since *Crack The Skye*"
VANESSA THORPE
PRODUCTION EDITOR

TRIVIUM
In The Court Of The Dragon
"Yet another banging Trivium album"
LOUISE BROCK
ART EDITOR

ULVER
Scary Muzak
"The soundtrack to the greatest film John Carpenter never made"
DAVE EVERLEY
FREELANCE NEWS EDITOR

NEW NOISE

DYING WISH

Seething radical politics meets raw personal turmoil – metalcore's next-gen firebrands are out to torch the status quo

WORDS: DANNII LEIVERS • PICTURE: ANDREW LE

Dying Wish: left a bit... left a bit more...

IN SHORT:

SOUNDS LIKE: Incendiary violence executed with a visceral social/political conscience

FOR FANS OF: Knocked Loose, Killswitch Engage, Bleeding Through

LISTEN TO: *Enemies In Red*

EMMA BOSTER REMEMBERS

where she was when she received the message that would change the course of her band's future. The singer with incendiary metalcore five-piece Dying Wish was working at a local venue in her hometown of Portland, setting the stage for an Atreyu gig that evening. Suddenly, she got an Instagram DM from Knocked Loose vocalist Bryan Garris, asking her to lend her vocals to *A Serpent's Touch*, a track on their upcoming second album, *A Different Shade Of Blue*.

"We had played a show with Knocked Loose in 2018 when we were still a very new band," Emma remembers. "They played a headline show here in Portland, they hand-selected the local support and chose us. Then, [a year later] out of the blue, Bryan messaged me on Instagram and asked me to do the feature. I remember exactly where I was and what I was doing because I will never forget that moment."

Today, Emma describes the opportunity as transformative. Not long after Knocked Loose released their album, on which Emma's unrepentant guest spot was an obvious highlight, Dying Wish were offered a support slot on Counterparts' US tour, another step early in their journey to be hardcore's brightest new hopes.

"It elevated us," she says, speaking from her home, having just returned from a short US tour with The Acacia Strain. "We were visible to more people, and I felt I was visible to more people, which is a scary and vulnerable thing, but it's really transformed the way I feel about the band and the way I feel about myself as far as confidence goes."

It's taken Emma years to grow into her role as band leader, but now she's emerging as one of heavy music's most blistering young voices. Having discovered hardcore aged 16 at a Punch show in Portland, she formed Dying Wish in 2018 with drummer Jeff Yambra, guitarist Pedro Carrillo, guitarist/songwriter Sam Reynolds and bassist Andrew Le. Together, they've developed a devastatingly violent, emotional sound that nods to Swedish melodeath and 00s metalcore giants Killswitch Engage and Bleeding Through, raging with social and political turmoil.

Their debut, *Fragments Of A Bitter Memory*, which was recorded over a month in New Jersey during summer 2020 for Sharptone Records and which sees Bryan Garris return the favour by featuring on the unflinching *Enemies In Red*, is one of the most powerful statements you'll hear this year, not least as a result of Emma's raw, personal lyrics. It's an album, she says, she couldn't have written at the band's inception three years ago.

"There's a level of maturity and a perspective on things that I hadn't had before in my life," she says. "It was a growing experience to be able to verbalise a lot of things I've needed to say for such a long time."

Emma has vented her anger and emotions on the title track and *Severing The Senses*, which see her working through her past, growing up with an abusive, violent and alcoholic stepfather. "It was a lot of living in a daily hell, which I feel a lot of people stuck in abusive relationships can relate to. Living in constant fear of doing the wrong thing and feeling you have to walk on eggshells. There was a lot of violence and emotional abuse."

While she ended her relationship with her stepfather 10 years ago, her lyrics seethe with unbridled fury and resentment: *"You are everything I despise,"* she bellows on *Fragments Of A Bitter Memory*. *"Drunken devil. Wicked eyes. I would bury you if I could."* Even so, she sought to capture the complex and conflicting emotions that come with surviving such a toxic situation: *"Still I chose to love you despite the demise of the man I had once known."*

"A lot of the perspective I wrote from was, my stepfather is an addict and I know one day I'm going to get that phone call that he's passed away," she says. "And I'm going feel a lot of complex feelings – guilt, but also relief. These interactions are very complex and it's difficult to understand how I feel about them a lot of the time."

There's political anger too: the cutting track *Innate Thirst* is inspired by the band's fierce political position, and their involvement in the BLM protests that broke out in Portland in 2020.

"We try to embrace moving further left than the neo liberal fascist middle," says Emma, reluctant to cite Donald Trump's presidential defeat last year as a victory for America. "Our left politics are more radicalised than what the Democratic Party represent. The two parties have a lot more in common with each other than what we have with them. We're very more so power to the people, not power to the parties."

When asked what keeps her and her bandmates up at night, though, Emma's thoughts turn to the longevity of the band, as well as their innate need to create music that matters. "We want to speak about important topics, not just the same old vague topics a lot of bands talk about in metal," she says vehemently. "Ten years from now, we're still want to be doing this. We want to make an impact."

"THERE WAS A LOT OF VIOLENCE AND EMOTIONAL ABUSE"

***FRAGMENTS OF A BITTER MEMORY* IS OUT NOW VIA SHARPTONE RECORDS**

NEW NOISE

POORSTACY

Nu metal-loving genre-smasher with the Oli Sykes seal of approval

WORDS: DANNII LEIVERS

POORSTACY HAS NO problem in calling big-name rock stars out on their shit. "Fuck Travis Barker, he's a bitch," says the man whose hyperactive mix of emo, industrial, hip hop and metal is whipping up a buzz. The Blink-182 drummer-turned-Kardashian-adjacent tabloid fixture was supposed to play on the track *Children Of The Dark*, from Stacy's recent album, *Party At The Cemetery*. "I took him off because he sent me a ridiculous bill and then he covered my drums. I'm like, 'I sent you the song to put on new drums, not put on the same drums I did, then put your name on it for money.'"

The 22-year-old Floridian's unshakeable self-belief and genre-splicing sound has won him a fervent following, and more friends in high places. Rabid single *Knife Party* features Bring Me The Horizon's frontman Oli Skyes in full-on, *Count Your Blessings* scream mode. "I love what Oli is doing now, it makes so much sense and he's diversifying," he continues. "But I was like, 'I want the Oli that my 12-year-old self would have freaked out about on this song.'"

Having dropped out of school aged 16 to focus on making music, Poorstacy – real name Carlito Milfort – started his career rapping over clipped beats on tracks uploaded to SoundCloud, but quickly became disillusioned with the music he was making. "I fucking hated it. It was really fucking bad," he says.

Instead, he decided to incorporate the heavier influences of his formative years: Disturbed, Slipknot and My Chemical Romance. 2020's guitar-heavy single *Darkness* (taken from the same year's debut album, *The Breakfast Club*), pointed the way to what he's doing now.

"I wasn't thinking, 'What's going to make me popular or stream well?'" says Stacy. "I wanted to do what I actually love. That's where *Party At The Cemetery* began. You're building your own world, whatever your childhood self would want, make sure you have it."

IN SHORT

SOUNDS LIKE: Spontaneous emo-rock on the cusp of great things

FOR FANS OF: Bring Me The Horizon, Hot Milk, My Chemical Romance

LISTEN TO: *Party At The Cemetery*

***PARTY AT THE CEMETERY* IS OUT NOW VIA 10K PROJECTS**

THOUGHTCRIMES

Ex-Dillinger man aims to satisfy your post-hardcore needs

WORDS: CHRISTINA WENIG

ENDINGS MAKE WAY for new beginnings, if you're lucky. When The Dillinger Escape Plan were laid to rest in 2017, it allowed drummer Billy Rymer to focus on his new creative outlet, Thoughtcrimes. Not having played the guitar in years, this project made him rediscover the instrument of his past. "I used to play guitar so much as a kid. People describe my playing as playing drums on guitar, it's very rhythmic. I just enjoy constructing songs and writing patterns," he says about creating the band's 2019 EP, *Tap Night*, which has recently been reissued.

The New York-based band – Billy plus vocalist Rick Pepa, bassist Cody Hosza and guitarists Russ Savarese and Brian Sullivan – are following Dillinger's footsteps in the best way possible; *Tap Night* is a whirlwind of staggering riffs, odd time signatures and vicious outbursts, but also a whole lot of melody and groove.

His past is ingrained in his mentality, too. Taking just one week to record the debut EP, Billy channelled the self-imposed pressure to get things done: "I like the idea of not being so much of a perfectionist that you beat an idea into the ground. I figured it was an EP, we could do it. I don't want to do that again but we made it and we're proud of it."

For their first full-length, to be expected early 2022, Thoughtcrimes allowed themselves more time to create something even bigger and better. "We definitely stepped it up a notch by just being more ambitious," reckons Billy. "I was able to attack things I didn't think I could in the past."

IN SHORT

SOUNDS LIKE: A vicious breaking down of the barriers of hardcore to spread chaos all over

FOR FANS OF: The Dillinger Escape Plan, Every Time I Die, Coalesce

LISTEN TO: *Wedlock Waltz*

***TAP NIGHT* IS OUT NOW VIA PURE NOISE**

POORSTACY: PRESS. THOUGHTCRIMES: PRESS/TOM FLYNN.

SWAMP COFFIN

Kylie-loving sludgesters stand defiant in the face of despair

WORDS: RICH HOBSON • PICTURE: ELLEN RHODES

IN SHORT

SOUNDS LIKE:
The death throes of a titan drowning in a tar-pit of misery

FOR FANS OF:
Raging Speedhorn, Conjurer, Mistress

LISTEN TO:
Barbarian Windsor

THERE'S BEEN NO shortage of tragedy feeding into the music of Swamp Coffin, the Rotheram-based sludge metal trio drawing on a series of unfortunate events unfolding around the life of singer/guitarist Jon Rhodes.

First, the night before they were recording their initial demo, Jon was awoken at 2.30am and told his brother-in-law had been killed in a car crash. Then, before the band recorded their first EP, *Flatcap Bastard Features*, his house burned down. Such events fed into the cloud of snarling nastiness that is *Noose Almighty*, but Jon still found some semblance of a silver lining.

"We were really close," he says of his brother-in-law. "He was a music nerd and there's a video of me in the studio doing our Kylie Minogue cover [*Two Hearts*] and as I do the solo I broke down because it was still fresh and I knew he'd never hear any of [our music]. This album has helped me move past it some of those emotions. I'm still pissed off, but it feels like I'm getting over the events of the past few years and can focus on something else. I don't know what I'm going to be fucked off at next, but god help it."

***NOOSE ALMIGHTY* IS OUT NOW VIA APF**

EXTINCTION AD

Long Island thrashers re-emerge recharged and raring to go

WORDS: EDWIN McFEE

IN SHORT

SOUNDS LIKE:
Whiplash inducing, punk peppered politicised thrash

FOR FANS OF:
Sepultura, Evile, Havok

LISTEN TO:
Chaos

THEY SAY IRON sharpens iron and that's certainly true for Extinction AD. After a year from hell that saw the Long Island, NY thrashers leave their label, suspend plans to record a third LP and cancel tours, they've returned armed with an explosive new four-track EP, *Chaos, Collusion, Carnage & Propaganda,* and sound like a band reborn.

"We're too old and stubborn to give up," says singer/guitarist Rick Jimenez with a laugh. "We feel like this is a new beginning for us. If what we were doing before was like a barrage of fists, this is fists covered in barbed wire, holding bats and driving a van with no brakes."

Written and recorded remotely and released via their new label, Unique Leader, their EP – featuring three originals plus a cover of Sepultura's *Propaganda* – is a lightning-fast, speaker-shaking statement of intent. Wrapping razor sharp riffs around lyrics which rage against the machine, these tracks will open pits and minds.

"I feel like in the past we were waving our arms around trying to get people's attention and now we've got our hands around their throats and we're saying 'Hey, you're gonna have to pay attention to us!' and it seems everyone is happy to be strangled right now."

***CHAOS, COLLUSION, CARNAGE & PROPAGANDA* IS OUT NOW VIA UNIQUE LEADER**

PRESS. EPICA: PRESS/TIM TRONCKOE. MAIRINA: PRESS.

IN THE KNOW

What your favourite bands are listening to

MARINA

"I'M ENJOYING A singer from the UK called Marina. It's basically pop music but she's not your average generic pop singer. I especially love the lyrics on her latest album, *Ancient Dreams In A Modern Land* – she writes about great topics. She's talented, she's gorgeous, and I hope to meet her one day."

SIMONE SIMONS, EPICA

HOARD ALMIGHTY

Box sets, underground oddities and all the essential merch you need this month

IHSAHN

The Hyperborean Collection

SPINEFARM/CANDLELIGHT

£269.99

WHEN IHSAHN EMBARKED on his post-Emperor solo career, expectations were sky high. To say that the Norwegian has fulfilled all that early promise would be a grotesque understatement: *The Hyperborean Collection* showcases 15 years of extraordinary music, all looking and sounding magnificent on pristine clear vinyl. Housed in a lavish, dazzling white box, all seven full-length albums are here, from solo debut *The Adversary* (2006) to the widely acclaimed *Ámr* (2018), alongside the recent *Telemark* and *Pharos* EPs and a comprehensive art and lyric book. Master of everything from soul-scorching black metal and pitch-black prog to beautifully dark electronic pop, Ihsahn has produced a unique and remarkable body of work, reborn here in the classiest way imaginable.

tinyurl.com/ihsahn-box

SABATON BOX SET

£117.80

This ultra-limited collection contains two LPs, a chunky earbook and arty gewgaws galore. We also reckon you could drive a tank over the box itself – a fittingly chunky testament to Sabaton's musical and conceptual grandeur.

tinyurl.com/sabaton-warbox

KILLSTAR EAR MUFFS

£17.99

Keep warm and extend Halloween this winter with these Killstar ear muffs. Not only does it complement the Ozzy Sweater for full-on bat mode, you'll probably pick up chatter on the Chiropteric frequencies too.

tinyurl.com/bat-muffs

KREATOR BOX SET

£84.15

Collecting all the various mediums of this Teutonic thrash metal's 2001 classic, the *Violent Revolution* box set includes CD, vinyl and even a Kreator comic. It's limited to 1,000 copies, so move faster than a thrash riff!

tinyurl.com/kreator-box

MASTODON HAIL SANTA T-SHIRT

£18.99-20.99

Georgia's legendary heavy metal mavericks explore some deep, emotional themes with their eighth full-length. Less deep, or emotional, is this seasonal t-shirt guaranteed to invoke His Infernal… Presents…?

tinyurl.com/santa-don

MÖTLEY CRÜE - THE DIRT: DECLASSIFIED

£18.89-£226.74

If this new comic book is to be believed, consuming bucketloads of drugs and steering boats with their willies weren't rock'n'roll hijinks, but the perfect cover for life as crime-thwarting government agents. Who knew?!

tinyurl.com/graphic-crue

ORPHANED LAND BOX SET

£39.99

This eight-CD whopper is a fitting tribute to the Israeli progsters' 30-year career. For your bucks you get their six full-length albums, along with two bonus discs of live cuts, covers, demos and alternative takes.

tinyurl.com/orphaned-box

THOR'S HAMMER WATER BOTTLE

£21.98

Gym-goer? Whether you're working on Hemsworth-style guns or trying to achieve buns ov steel, you also need to hydrate. Wow your fellow beefcakes by glugging from the mighty Mjölnir before your next 10 reps.

tinyurl.com/thors-thirst

YE BANISHED PRIVATEERS T-SHIRT

£21.05

Sweden: notorious for its pirate scourge and tradition of Celtic-flavoured shanties. Right? Celebrate the oddly most authentic-sounding pirate troupe with this parchment-coloured cartographical curio!

tinyurl.com/banished-tee

OZZY XMAS SWEATER

£35

If you want to keep your metalhead street-cred while still getting into the Christmas spirit, look no further than this Ozzy Osbourne jumper, complete with logo, bat, Viking runes and wool.

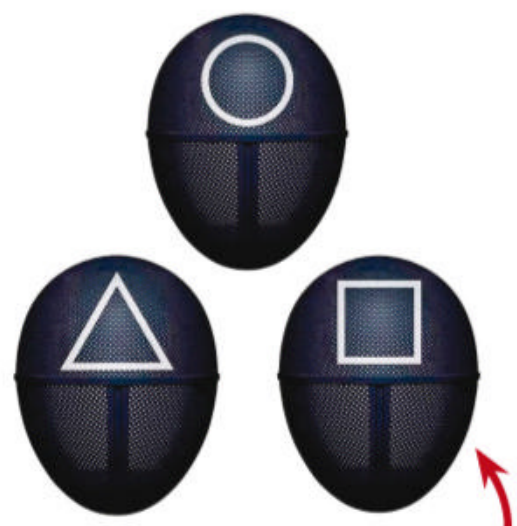
tinyurl.com/ozzy-sweater

IMPERIAL TRIUMPHANT T-SHIRT

£19

NYC's jazz-battered avant-metal masterminds don't just make great music, they make some decent threads as well. This artfully obtuse 'emptiness through decadence' shirt is a prime example – ornate gold mask sold separately.

tinyurl.com/imperial-tshirt



SQUID GAME MASKS

£8.99

Raise the stakes at the family's Christmas Pictionary session by turning up in a stretchy henchman mask stolen straight from the *Squid Game* island. Just don't take it off in public – you know what'll happen if you do.

tinyurl.com/stretch-squid

ARCHSPIRE HOODIE

£34.99

While their studio albums might be stone cold classics, their merch'll be keeping you warm all winter. Rep your support for latest album *Bleed The Future* with an extra trippy-design on the back too!

tinyurl.com/archspire-hood

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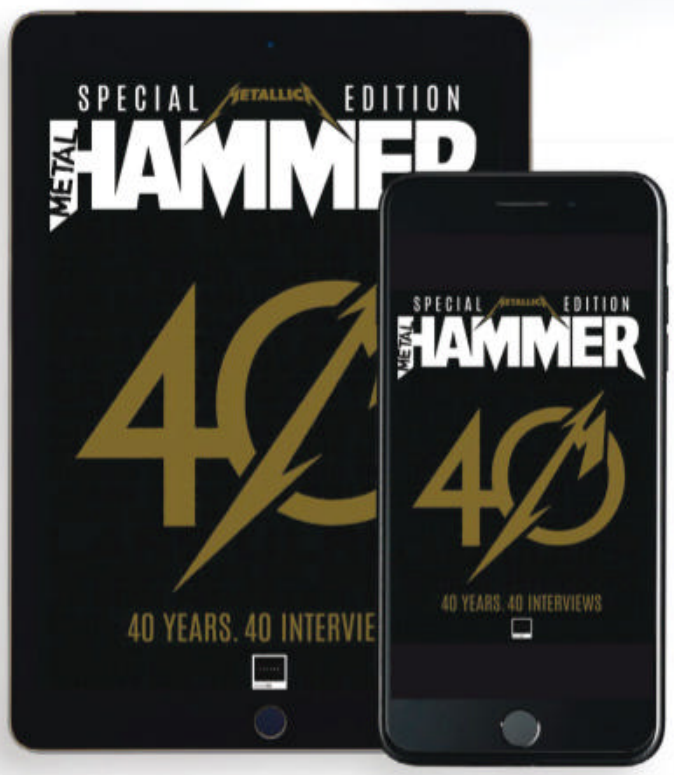

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FUTURE

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GIGS! FESTIVALS! FEUDS! EUROVISION?!

2021

THE BIG REVIEW

2021 was a year that managed to bring some sense of normality back to metal while throwing all new manner of curveballs, challenges and straight-up craziness at us. From the sublime (Iron Fucking Maiden!) to the ridiculous (Machine Gun Kelly vs Slipknot?!) and everything in between, over the next 25 pages we'll bring you the definitive guide to 12 months that we'll never, ever forget.

THE YEAR THAT...

METAL BOUNCED BACK

After a year where tours and festivals were cruelly snatched from us and many bands were forced to push their album plans back, in 2021, the floodgates finally opened. Metal was back

WORDS: RICH HOBSON

It's baaaaack...! Society might be opening and closing like screen doors in a hurricane, but live music made a triumphant return in 2021 as clubs, venues and even festivals got back in business. In the UK, it all began on May 26 with the surprise announcement that Download festival would be hosting a pilot event in mid June, with 10,000 lucky fans invited back to Donington Park to mosh in the rain.

It was an emotional reunion, as fans who had tested negative for COVID removed their masks and the overwhelming doom of the pandemic abated. Liverpool nu metal revivalists Death Blooms had the prestigious honour of playing the first full-capacity set without restrictions since the pandemic began, kickstarting a weekend of incredible highs that included career-highlight sets from While She Sleeps and Skindred, and the minting of first-time Download headliners Bullet For My Valentine.

The event helped pave the way for the reopening of music venues on July 19, ending a drought that had plunged much of the UK's music scene into crisis, and festivals such as Bloodstock, Reading & Leeds and Damnation later took place at full capacity. The return of live music in 2021 certainly wasn't a panacea for everything we've had – and may yet – endure due to this pandemic, but it *was* a reminder of how it felt to sing until your voice gives out, and stand shoulder to shoulder with strangers as you watch the music you love come to life in a way no high-quality audio file or streaming service can ever replicate. In turn, it reminded us that metal isn't just a music genre – it's a community.

Sadly, it was also a community challenged by events that provoked disappointment, outrage and distress. In January, alarming scenes emerged as protesters, including Iced Earth guitarist Jon Schaffer, stormed the Capitol Building in Washington DC, attacking the functional and symbolic heart of the US government. Hastily assembled barricades became the only thing separating elected officials from a baying mob, threatening the US's democratic process in scenes that could have come straight from dystopian fiction.

Weeks later, actress Evan Rachel Wood ended long-running speculation when she publicly accused ex-partner Marilyn Manson of abuse. A string of similar accusations emerged from other women, resulting in California State Senator Susan Rubio calling for an FBI investigation. Though Manson denied all accusations, reports emerged that he had been dropped by his label and manager.

It wasn't the only time this year that rock and metal's place in a post-#MeToo world came under intense scrutiny. The sobering BBC documentary

DOWNLOAD PILOT WAS A WEEKEND OF INCREDIBLE HIGHS

JUDAS PRIEST: TINA KORHONEN

Judas Priest at Bloodstock festival. Fuck, yes

Wargasm brought the party to Download Pilot

Music's Dirty Secrets: Women Fight Back, aired in January. It featured Svalbard/Noctule's Serena Cherry, Ithaca's Djamila Azzouz and Kerrang! Radio/BBC Radio 1 DJ Sophie K sharing their experiences as part of a wider investigation into endemic sexism and sexual abuse in the music industry.

In October, Bloodstock festival director Vicky Hungerford came under fire for social media posts in which she mocked people for including their pronouns in their email sign-offs, sparking accusations of transphobia. Following the huge backlash, Vicky apologised and it was announced she would be stepping back from the festival to "properly educate herself for a better understanding".

If such events made for alarming reading, amidst it all, vital voices grew stronger. Podcasts such as Hell Bent For Metal and On Wednesdays We Wear Black – featuring *Hammer* contributors Tom Dare and Yasmine Summan, respectively – have flown the flag for LGBTQ+ and POC visibility in metal, helping to spotlight some of the challenges facing the industry from a fresh perspective.

If you were doubting metal's ability to reach huge audiences in the modern era, you clearly weren't paying any attention this year. Whether it was Architects bagging a No.1 album in the UK with *For Those That Wish To Exist*, or everyone from scene mainstays like Gojira, Trivium and Mastodon to youngsters like Spiritbox and Jinjer racking up millions of streams on singles from their most recent albums, 2021 has shown that the genre is in rude health wherever you look.

Artists such as Backxwash, Emma Ruth Rundle and Lingua Ignota returned, affirming their statuses as iconoclasts who are helping to redefine the boundaries of what heavy music can be, while Poppy, Wargasm and Dana Dentata were just some of the artists using metal as jumping-off points for all manners of genre-crossing shenanigans.

Heavy metal itself, in fact, has reached a point where it feels like all subgenres are being embraced. Even nu metal, the perennial whipping boy of the scene, has enjoyed a resurgence, with exciting new bands such as Tetrarch, Tallah and Death Blooms embracing the genre's influence, while former outliers Mudvayne got heralded as prodigal sons when they announced their comeback. Hell, we even got a good Limp Bizkit album – how's that for evening the scales?

Not to be outdone, two of metal's biggest names reiterated exactly why they're global icons. Iron Maiden's 17th studio album, *Senjutsu*, went to No.1 in 13 countries, only held off the top spot in the UK by Drake's *Certified Lover Boy*. The band's second double album in their 46-year history, *Senjutsu* was every bit as ambitious and sprawling as their fans have come to expect, its lyrics covering everything from Shogunate Japan to World War II Britain.

But perhaps the biggest celebration this year was *The Black Album* turning 30, reinforcing Metallica's status as metal's biggest band. In a year that saw landmark albums from Rammstein (*Mutter*), Slipknot (*Iowa*) and System Of A Down (*Toxicity*) all turn 20 (as well as a frankly absurd number of landmark releases from the early 90s grunge and alternative explosion turn 30 themselves), Metallica still managed to go bigger than anyone else. After all, who else could have put together a covers record featuring 50+ artists (*The Metallica Blacklist)* and somehow make it not just work, but reaffirm the band's cultural significance by getting the likes of Rina Sawayama, Biffy Clyro and The Hu to embrace their inner Hetfield?

Even with the physical limitations on touring this year, metal has seldom felt more global. Filmmaker Dr. Nelson Varas-Diaz continued documenting the incredible stories emerging from Latin America's metal scenes, as bands in Chile, Colombia and Ecuador fought for better lives for their communities. Bands across the planet raised awareness of societal issues, whether it was Nervosa fighting against the populist government of Brazil, French

METALLICA MANAGED TO GO BIGGER THAN ANYONE ELSE

WARGASM: KEVIIN NIXON

Architects scored a well-deserved UK No.1 album

Tetrarch: the next gen of nu metal

Alexi Laiho

Joey Jordison

LG Petrov

Aries 'Eben' Tanto

metallers Gojira fundraising for indigenous communities in the Amazon rainforest, System Of A Down livestreaming to raise money for wounded Armenian soldiers, or Māori metallers Alien Weaponry continuing to highlight the issues facing indigenous communities in New Zealand.

There was a mass exodus of musicians and civilians from Afghanistan, as the country was re-taken by the Taliban after 20 years of conflict with the US. Even with their lives on the line and the future uncertain, the metal musicians *Metal Hammer* spoke to were utterly resolved in continuing to make the music they loved – as Afghan black metal band Rig Veda mastermind Metal Sam told us, "Metal has been my life since I was a teenager, so I can't just give it up."

The immense impact metal's had on our lives is felt especially keenly when remembering the icons we've lost. The year had barely started when we learned that legendary shredder and Children Of Bodom founder Alexi Laiho had passed away. In March, ex-Entombed vocalist LG Petrov died from bile duct cancer, leaving the world mourning the man who helped characterise Swedish death metal.

On July 27, we were rocked by the announcement that Slipknot founding drummer Joey Jordison had died in his sleep, aged 46. A statement from Joey's ex-bandmates in Slipknot illustrated his immense contribution to the band and metal culture as a whole: "Without him, there would be no us."

Eric Wagner, ex-vocalist of American doom metal group Trouble, died in August following complications arising from COVID. A couple of weeks later, Burgerkill co-founder and guitarist Aries 'Eben' Tanto passed away, after collapsing in Bandung. A star of Indonesia's metal scene, Eben had helped Burgerkill become an international sensation in the 26 years since he helped form the band.

It wasn't just departed musicians who left enormous holes in our community; the deaths of Megaforce Records co-founder Marsha Zazula, and respected music journalists Malcolm Dome and Peter Makowski, represented the loss of some of the key background figures in the story of heavy metal's development.

The shape of metal fandom and engagement also continued to evolve. All manner of things went viral this year, from Papa Roach storming TikTok to the emotional footage of Possessed vocalist Jeff Becerra walking for the first time in more than 30 years. We might also still be working out what NFTs are, but that didn't stop us seeking out exclusive launches from Babymetal, Korn and Megadeth. 2021 reminded us there were so many worthwhile ways to connect.

As metal god Rob Halford so aptly put it 41 years ago – and reminded us yet again with a stunning performance in front of 20,000 people at Bloodstock festival – *'United, united, united we stand / United we never shall fall'.* In divisive and uncertain times, the message is a reminder that, at the end of the day, we're all in it together for one thing: heavy fucking metal. We'll catch you down the front.

ARCHITECTS: PRESS/ED MASON. ALEXI: PRESS. JOEY: GETTY. LG: PRESS. EBENZ: PRESS.

THE YEAR THAT...

METAL GOT BACK ON THE ROAD

Tours! Moshing! Crowd-surfing! Stupidly overpriced beer! Everything we'd dearly missed in 2020 was back with a vengeance

WORDS: MATT MILLS

Download Pilot was everything we wanted and needed

By December 2020, the world was well and truly sick of COVID-19's bullshit. We'd come in and out of lockdowns, infection rates had risen and fallen and risen again, and, of course, none of us had been to a good concert in eight months. It sucked.

Yet, that was the month we got our first glimmer of hope in the gigless void: the commencement of the UK's vaccination programme. The idea was that, once enough people had been jabbed, the transmission rates and symptom severity of COVID would fall, lessening pressure on the NHS and allowing the country and its music venues to open up again.

Since the world froze the preceding March, many bands had kept themselves busy by writing or sharing new material, albeit with no idea when or if they would get to promote it. "We released our last album, *Fracture*, during the pandemic [in May 2020]," remembers Ali Richardson, the drummer for Scottish metal quintet Bleed From Within. "The main reason for that was to give us something to work towards and really keep us in the forefront of people's minds. It was the right thing to do, but the downside is we haven't been able to tour it as we normally would."

Livestreams had sprung up to plug the gap, providing opportunities for bands to experiment with new locations and formats. In December, prog metal luminaries Tesseract streamed their *Portals* performance from Lite Up Studios in Fareham, featuring conceptual video clips and a huge lighting setup. "I think *Portals* really opened doors for us," says frontman Dan Tompkins. "COVID enabled us to do something that we've never had the ability to do before: put together a huge production with lasers and projections."

Alongside many other musicians – most notably, Matt Heafy of Trivium – Dan also went the extra step by drastically upping his Twitch streaming. The platform proved a win/win during the pandemic, giving fans (many of whom had been furloughed or were working from home) behind-the-scenes insight into their favourite bands, while content creators could earn cash through donations. "I've had loads of people say that my streaming got them through a very difficult period of life," Dan says.

Despite these consolations, uncertainty over gigs continued to reign well into spring 2021. Rollout of the vaccine continued both here and overseas, but it couldn't prevent tours from getting announced and rescheduled again and again. Then, on May 26, Download festival made a surprise announcement: it would return the following month as a limited-capacity pilot, to test the safety of large-scale public events. Finally, live music was back!

"The Download Pilot was such an emotional show for us," states Ali, whose band played a pyro-powered set on the festival's Saturday morning. "We knew, coming back after the release of *Fracture*, that doing something like the main stage of Download was a great opportunity for us and could showcase where we're at as a band. What a release!"

Following a widespread lifting of UK restrictions on July 19, the floodgates opened. Bloodstock came back in August, bringing Devin Townsend across the pond for a UK exclusive. Then, Bring Me The Horizon swept the country in the first arena-level rock tour in a year and a half. Architects and While She Sleeps belatedly toured new material as well.

Stateside, the aptly named Metal Tour Of The Year – featuring Megadeth, Lamb Of God, Trivium and Hatebreed

KEVIN NIXON

"WE WENT OUT AND FUCKING SMASHED IT"

ALI RICHARDSON, BLEED FROM WITHIN

All the feels: Bleed From Within's emotional set at Download Pilot

Green screen: Metallica at Aftershock

Tesseract's Dan Tompkins: powering through

BLEED FROM WITHIN: KEVIN NIXON. AFTERSHOCK: STEPHANIE CABRAL. TESSERACT: DUNCAN EVERSON.

METAL GOT BACK ON THE ROAD

– began in August, with *Hammer* writer Joe Daly remarking on its "abundantly festive" atmosphere. There were the Danny Wimmer Presents festivals: Kentucky's Louder Than Life in September, California's Aftershock in October, and Florida's Welcome To Rockville in November. Meanwhile, the 28-date Knotfest Roadshow boasted Code Orange, Fever 333, Killswitch Engage and Slipknot; it wrapped with a mega-show at LA's Banc Of California Stadium, which added Vended and Bring Me The Horizon to the bill, and was streamed worldwide (see p.92).

In October and November, Bullet For My Valentine toured the UK with Tesseract and Bleed From Within in tow. "We went out and fucking smashed it," says Ali, cheerfully. "It was an incredible tour for us and we really saw the effect of it. Within 24 hours of playing Manchester with Bullet, our own headline show [there] sold out."

Dan initially had the opposite experience. The opening date at Nottingham's Motorpoint Arena on Halloween marked his first time onstage since the pandemic had begun. "I had a nightmare," he says. "I didn't feel like I had the stamina to pull off a 45-minute-plus set. There was one point where I was having such a bad time that I felt like quitting."

Fortunately, the singer recalibrated as the jaunt progressed. Some of his Twitch followers even attended the London date at Hammersmith Apollo to show support. "Some flew from Italy, some came from Scotland; people from different countries got together because they followed me on Twitch and built a community. Incredible."

However, COVID remains a threat for any tour, as the singer's painfully aware. Tesseract pulled out of the final Bullet date, in Brighton, because someone in their touring party tested positive (the same thing has happened to bands from Korn to Pijn). They were also due to support Trivium on a UK run next February, but pandemic travel restrictions mean it's been postponed to 2023. The prog-metallers aren't part of the rescheduled dates, which Dan calls "soul-destroying".

Nonetheless, both Tesseract and Bleed From Within are optimistic for 2022. The bands each promise that a new album will come next year, with touring off the back of them an inevitability. "We'd like to take a version of *Portals* live on tour and do an extensive tour of the UK, which we've never done," says Dan.

"Hopefully COVID stays at bay and we can return to some form of normality," adds Ali.

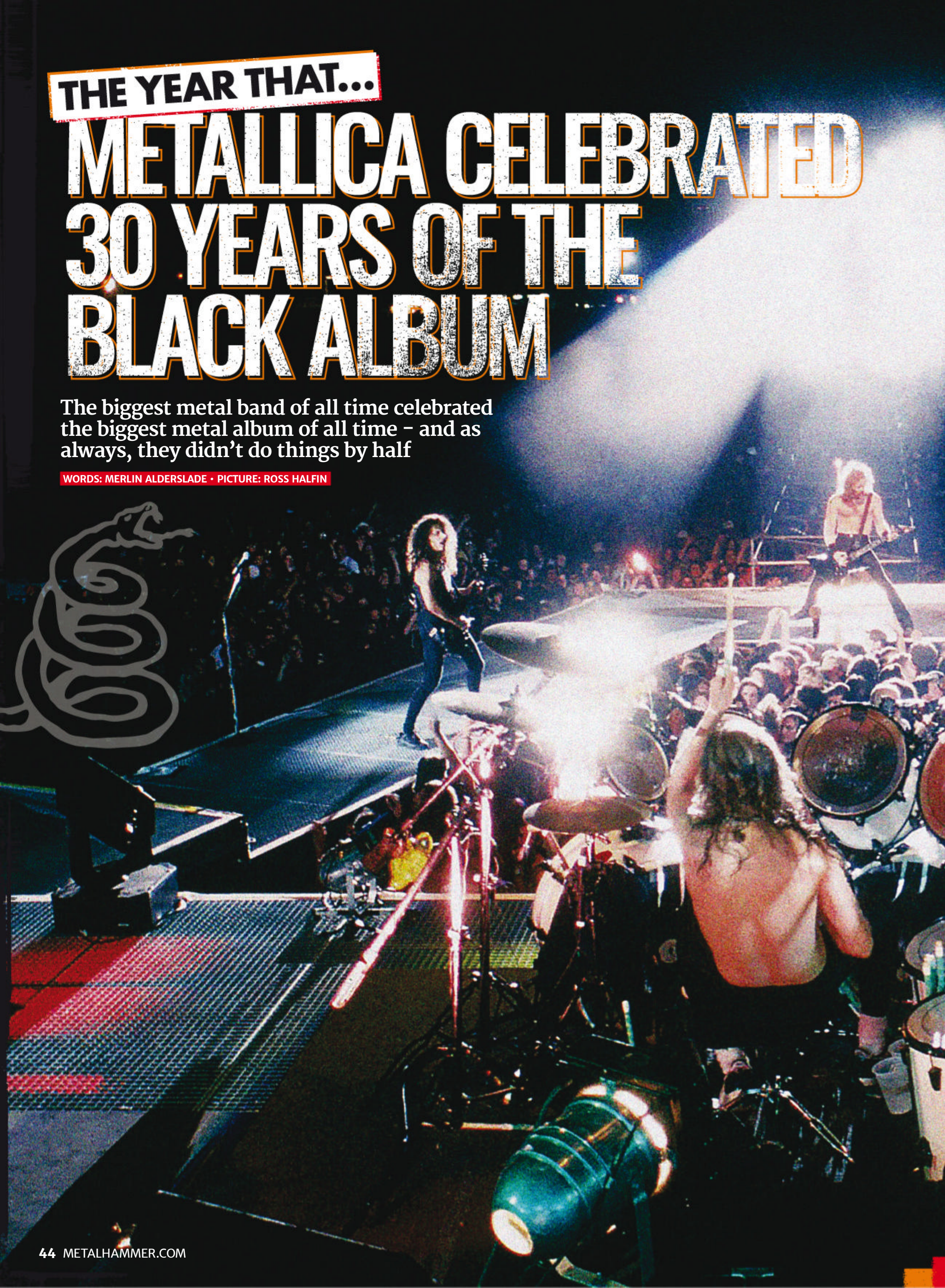
We couldn't agree more.

THE YEAR THAT...

METALLICA CELEBRATED 30 YEARS OF THE BLACK ALBUM

The biggest metal band of all time celebrated the biggest metal album of all time – and as always, they didn't do things by half

WORDS: MERLIN ALDERSLADE • PICTURE: ROSS HALFIN



Metallica are rarely ones to indulge in nostalgia too much – for every swish *...And Justice For All* reissue or playing of *Master In Puppets* in full, there's a handful of brand new projects on the go or harebrained schemes in the pipeline. That said, when it came time to celebrate the 30th anniversary of their record-breaking, game-changing self-titled opus – AKA *The Black Album* – they knew it was time to break out the big guns. After all, this was the album that changed Metallica's career forever, as they graduated from the thrash metal movement and shot straight to the very top of heavy metal's hierarchy forevermore.

"We had our sights set on bigger things," Kirk Hammett told our sister mag *Classic Rock* earlier this year, when discussing the creation of their biggest album ever. "You have to remember that there had been some mega albums around that time – Bon Jovi, Def Leppard, Bruce Springsteen… eight million, nine million copies sold. And we wanted that. It's obvious. We wanted a *Back In Black*."

As we now all know, Metallica would get their wish. *Metallica* would hit No.1 in countries around the world, including the US and UK, going on to sell more than 25 million copies worldwide. Thirty years on, its impact was plain to see, and the Four Horsemen intended to make the most of it. As well as playing the album in full at a smattering of US festivals that marked the band's return to the stage after two years, Metallica unleashed a tsunami of releases celebrating the album's birthday, including bumper reissues, stunning box sets and enough merch to kit their most dedicated fans out for a year. Most interesting of all, though, was *The Metallica Blacklist*: a collection of more than 50 artists from across the musical spectrum covering songs from *The Black Album*, all released as a special charity box set. Featuring everyone from Miley Cyrus and Elton John to Ghost and Kamasi Washington, it was the most ambitious covers album ever put together, showing that even when it comes to looking backwards, Metallica remain determined to do things differently.

"It was an absolute honour, I'm in such great company," genre-spanning popstar Rina Sawayama, who covered *Enter Sandman*, told *Hammer* in September. "Metallica were one of the first gateways to dealing with the darkness of life," added Jim James, frontman with Louisville rockers My Morning Jacket, who covered *Nothing Else Matters*. "They really knew how to speak to the hurt and anger I experienced, and then help me turn it into something positive."

Ultimately, it all reconfirmed *The Black Album*'s place in history as a timeless classic whose impact in 2021 remains every bit as colossal as it was in 1991. H

"WE WANTED A *BACK IN BLACK*"

KIRK HAMMETT

THE YEAR THAT...

TRIVIUM SURPRISED US WITH THEIR GREATEST ALBUM EVER

Arriving 18 months after the excellent *What The Dead Men Say*, Trivium somehow raised the bar once more

WORDS: DANNII LEIVERS • PICTURE: MIKE DUNN

No one expected Trivium to return in 2021. The band had already released one excellent album during the pandemic, as well as setting the gold standard for livestreaming with their landmark event, *A Light Or A Distant Mirror*. But return they did, and with one of 2021's finest records, *In The Court Of The Dragon* – more proof that Trivium are on the form of their lives right now.

Of course, we've been here before. Having been touted as the saviours of metal when they broke through in 2005 with second album *Ascendancy*, as the Floridians' career progressed, they watched that momentum fluctuate over the following decade-plus. But no more. Immediately heralded by fans and critics as a career-best on its release, *In The Court Of The Dragon* was everything we wanted from Trivium, and indeed metal, in 2021, bringing together the progressive technicality of 2008's *Shogun*, the hook-heavy, huge grooves of 2017's *The Sin And The Sentence*, and the storming bombast of 2020's *What The Dead Men Say*.

"We didn't expect people would say that *In The Court Of The Dragon* is the best Trivium single of all time," says vocalist Matt Heafy, speaking from his home studio, where he streams daily to an ever-increasing audience on social media platform, Twitch. "That's not something you hear on record 10, you hear that on record one, two and three."

The band hadn't planned to write another album so soon, but towards the end of 2020, with spirits so high in the camp, riffs started to appear like green shoots in spring. "*Fall Into Your Hands* was one of the very first riffs that we worked on," remembers Matt. "I was just on stream one day on Twitch, playing with a new piece of gear, and I played that first riff. It's all about capturing lightning in a bottle for us. That's when we realise it's already time to start writing."

Matt will be the first to admit he's an 'over-thinker', while acknowledging the band are often guilty of over-prepping to a frightening level. But speaking to him today, it's clear the band's current purple patch is the result of an almost symbiotic, creative bond that's formed in their ranks as a result of sheer dedication to the craft. "It's great how collaborative we are now," he says. "When we're writing, if I play a riff, Corey [Beaulieu, guitar] and Paolo [Gregoletto, bass] will finish that thought without even speaking about it."

That organic writing process has allowed the band to look back and analyse where they went wrong in their shakier moments: 2006's Metallica-aping *The Crusade*, 2013's nu metal-influenced *Vengeance Falls*, and 2015's clean and meticulous *Silence In The Snow*. "I love those albums, they're part of our sound, but those were three records where we set constraints," explains Matt. "We said, 'Let's not go

"WE CAPTURED LIGHTNING IN A BOTTLE"

MATT HEAFY

here, here and here.' Every time we try to control this beast that is Trivium, it sets it a little bit astray. I feel like it's more 'us' when we allow anything and everything to happen."

Lyrically, too, *In The Court Of The Dragon* breaks new ground. After Matt's first draft, based on Thor and Ragnarök, was gently rebuffed by Paolo, the bassist suggested that the band create their own mythology. "When he said that, everything unlocked," says Matt. Across the album, the band pulled from Viking and Japanese mythology, as well as taking inspiration from *The King In Yellow*, a collection of short stories by American author Robert W. Chambers; the title track tells the story of a painting that induces madness in those who see it.

To bring the concept to life, the band scoured the internet for someone who could create the painting itself, eventually happening on the work of French artist Mathieu Nozieres. "He didn't know our band, he didn't know metal," says Matt. "We explained it to him very briefly and the second draft he gave us was that colosseum dragon [on the album cover art]. It took him four months of painting."

As part of the album launch, the band teamed up with The Sabbath – a Birmingham heavy music collective – for a listening party/art exhibition at local pub Dig Brew, where fans could view the original painting and see acoustic performances from members of Malevolence, Tesseract and Sylosis, as well as sampling Trivium's own craft lager, Ryujin Biru. "A sold-out beer and painting event for us in the birthplace of heavy metal," sighs Matt, shaking his head. "We Zoomed in, but I wish we could have been there in person. It was amazing."

Having ticked all that off his bucket list, Matt can now cross Twitter beef off there, too. In September, after rapper/pop punker Machine Gun Kelly took shots at Slipknot onstage at Chicago's Riot Fest, ("You wanna know what I'm really happy that I'm not doing? Being 50 years old wearing a fucking weird mask on a fucking stage, talking shit"), leading to an online war of words with Slipknot's Corey Taylor, Matt couldn't hold his tongue. Tweeting in response, he said: 'I'd like to formally diss Machine Gun Kelly for 'being 31 years old wearing a fucking 16-year-old pop punk cosplay identity on a fucking stage', before branding him 'Squirt Gun Smelly'.

Today he laughs about it, although he still takes the original offence seriously. "Corey didn't need me backing him up, he can handle it, but I took it as a personal affront to the world that I come from," he says. "If [MGK] was a prolific songwriter, singer, performer or philanthropist I wouldn't have said that, but unfortunately he's none of those things."

Although we have social media drama to keep us entertained, sadly it's going to be a long wait before we can see Trivium live in the UK. At the time of writing, the band had just postponed their 2022 dates to 2023, owing to COVID complications. It sucks for us, but US fans have been luckier, having witnessed Trivium on tour with Megadeth, Lamb Of God and Hatebreed this summer – the first opportunity to hear tracks from both *What The Dead Men Say* and *In The Court Of The Dragon* in person.

"You can't prepare for the adrenaline dump – it took three to five days to get a handle on it," says Matt, remembering the moment he stepped back out on stage for the first time in 20 months at the opening show in Austin, Texas. "But [we also did] Knotfest in Iowa… there were 30,000 people and the only show it felt similar to, was our first [now legendary 2005] Download festival appearance. That's how good that show was."

With that fire burning once again in their bellies, the band's attention has turned to the future, to major festivals and the unavoidable elephant in the room: is the band's righteous form enough to break the glass ceiling, and allow them to reach arena and Download Festival main stage headliner status?

"Absolutely. Let's put it in print!" Matt says smiling. "I'm calling out Download right now. Let's make this thing happen!" Only a fool would bet against them.

GETTY

THE YEAR THAT...

METAL MOURNED ALEXI LAIHO

The Finnish shredder and former Children Of Bodom frontman played and partied hard. Mastodon's Brann Dailor remembers his talented friend

WORDS: DANNII LEIVERS

As the year began, we received the sad news that we had lost Alexi Laiho, one of this century's most gifted shredders, the life and soul of the party, and by all accounts a gentle and kind man. He had formed the band Inearthed in 1993 with school friend and drummer Jaska Raatikainen, and by 1997 it had morphed into Children Of Bodom, named after the unsolved murder of three teenagers at Lake Bodom in their hometown of Espoo, a short drive from Helsinki. The band soon became known for their raucous and high-energy use of solos, keys and choruses.

Although COB split in 2019, Alexi continued to make music with new project Bodom After Midnight, and performed three small gigs in October 2020, two months before he passed away. In April of this year, the remaining members released the EP *Paint The Sky With Blood*, featuring the three songs they'd written together, as intense and impressive as anything Alexi had recorded before.

We asked Alexi's friend, Mastodon drummer/vocalist Brann Dailor, about his early memories of touring with metal's 'Wildchild'. RIP, Alexi.

When did you meet Alexi?
"[Mastodon] toured with Children Of Bodom in 2006 [as part of the Unholy Alliance Tour with Slayer and Lamb Of God]. It was a big arena tour and it was exciting. You have nothing but time all day long to hang out with each other, and then you have all night after the show – it feels like a travelling circus vibe."

What are your favourite memories of the Unholy Alliance Tour?
"As far as the party atmosphere and vibe, the Children Of Bodom guys were throwing down the hardest. There was a lot going on on their bus. I was like, 'I gotta get the fuck off this bus, you guys are sick maniacs.' Us [Mastodon] and Lamb Of God, we had reputations for being hard-partying bands. The Lamb Of God guys, that was the tour where they were supposed to be dry, but they were all drinking behind each other's backs, and it just fell apart. Then you got Kerry King [Slayer guitarist] running around with Jägermeister and Jeff [Hanneman, late Slayer guitarist] running around with Sambuca. It was insane. Alexi loved 80s hair metal pretty much more than anything else. He did not want to listen to anything else, I swear to God."

When did you last talk to him, and what do you remember about it?
"The last time I saw him, he was not looking good. I was very afraid for him. He was so frail… he was always a little guy, but this was different. I couldn't see it from the playing aspect – he was still ripping, he could steady his ship in a storm and be that brilliant guitar player – but then offstage he can hardly get the bus door open because it's too heavy for him."

"HE WAS STILL RIPPING"

What do you think is Alexi's legacy?
"He's inspired a generation of guitar players who are into the real heavy stuff but want to layer in some inspired solo work. What a talented person; he'll leave a big hole."

ALEXI: KEVIN NIXON. BRANN: PRESS/CLAY PATRICK MCBRIDE.

Forever the Wildchild

THE YEAR THAT...

JON SCHAFFER STORMED THE US CAPITOL

AKA: How to cancel yourself in spectacular style

WORDS: MERLIN ALDERSLADE

In perhaps the most surprising and straight-up bizarre story of the year, Iced Earth guitarist and band leader Jon Schaffer was photographed amid the angry mob of protesters who breached the US Capitol building in Washington DC on January 6. The photo, taken by Roberto Schmidt of the AFP agency, showed a furious, screaming Jon pointing off-camera, flanked by fellow rioters who had stormed the Capitol as politicians counted the electoral vote that saw Joe Biden become President Of The United States.

As fans began to recognise Jon in the shot, the news soon spread like wildfire. Some were shocked at the Iced Earth man's involvement, suggesting that not even deliriously 'patriotic' songs such as *When The Eagle Cries* foreshadowed him being capable of such acts. Others suggested it should be no surprise Jon was part of the angry mob, especially given that he had previously been photographed alongside supporters of outgoing President Donald Trump on November 15, speaking to German newspaper *Die Welt* while attending another protest in the US capital. "If someone uses violence against us, we will react accordingly. We don't want that, but we are ready," Jon told journalist Carolina Drüten at the time, adding: "They will go down. They're messing with the wrong people, believe me."

Most of the rioters were allowed to leave the scene, with investigators left to track them down. Jon would ultimately turn himself in to the FBI and face six criminal charges, eventually pleading guilty to two – obstruction of an official proceeding of Congress and trespassing on restricted grounds of the Capitol while armed with a deadly or dangerous weapon – as part of a plea deal struck with prosecutors.

> **"THERE ARE TIMES AND EVENTS WHEN YOU HAVE TO RE-EVALUATE YOUR LIFE"**
> EX-ICED EARTH SINGER, STU BLOCK

The first charge is punishable by up to 20 years in prison, while the second carries up to a 10-year prison term. At time of going to press, Jon was believed to be on conditional release, with his official sentencing date currently unknown.

Jon's actions and arrest also had repercussions from within his own band. Iced Earth vocalist Stu Block and bassist Luke Appleton both quit, with Luke stating: "In response to recent events and circumstances, I have notified Iced Earth's management and Jon that I will be resigning as the Iced Earth bassist with immediate effect. I would like to thank everyone who has sent me their support and love during this difficult time. Thank you!"

At the same time, Stu wrote: "Well, there are times and events when you have to take stock and re-evaluate your life, work, and trajectory for the future. That being said I have informed Jon and his current management that I must announce my resignation from Iced Earth with immediate effect."

Five people died during and a day after the protests, which were seen as one of the most scandalous displays in America's recent history.

GETTY

THE YEAR THAT... ROCK RULED EUROVISION

Fifteen years after Lordi took the crown, the Eurovision Song Contest was smashed by new Italian rock icons Måneskin

WORDS: ELIZABETH SCARLETT

This was the year the European Song Contest took us all by surprise. Although it's featured a smattering of rock and metal acts over the years – most notably Finland's Lordi, who won in 2006 – it's usually a poppy cheesefest. But in May the competition brought us Måneskin, one of the most exciting groups to come out of the show since ABBA shook their sparkly hips to *Waterloo* in 1974.

Having already made a name for themselves in their homeland on the Italian *X Factor* in 2017, the glammed-up hearthrobs – vocalist Damiano David, bassist Victoria De Angelis, guitarist Thomas Raggi and drummer Ethan Torchio – platform-stomped into first place with the rowdy, distortion-soaked *Zitti E Buoni*. Masterfully written and performed, it escaped the 'Eurovision novelty' tag and set them on a course to world domination.

Since the contest, the band have amassed a cult-like following as loyal and obsessed as the fans behind the Beatlemania phenomenon of the 60s. They're the new darlings of fashion empire Gucci, they've collaborated with Iggy Pop, supported The Rolling Stones, performed on numerous late-night TV talk shows, and have smashed TikTok and the charts globally with their singles *I Wanna Be Your Slave*, *Beggin'* (a cover of The Four Seasons' track), *Mammamia* and *Zitti E Buoni*. What their future holds is anyone's guess, but we imagine it'll soon involve arenas and summers at the top of festival bills.

THEY'VE AMASSED A CULT-LIKE FOLLOWING

In another victory for the riff, Lordi's countrymen Blind Channel finished in a respectable sixth position with their towering rager, *Dark Side*. Uniting fiery rap-rock with a punchy, elating chorus, their entry was a nostalgic blast of early 2000s nu metal that had us missing Linkin Park all the more. Following the competition, *Dark Side* entered the UK Rock And Metal chart at No.3, the UK Indie chart at No.11 and the UK singles at No.66, as well as high spots on music charts worldwide. We want more.

Refuting the age-old argument of rock's demise, Måneskin's win was a reminder of the genre's unshakable place within the hearts of music fans around the globe. On receiving the trophy, Damiano declared "Rock'n'roll never dies!" in a clichéd yet noble moment for all fans of heavy music.

Måneskin's win couldn't have come at a better time. Following months of regulations and limited fun, this year's Eurovision was the burst of rock-and-metal-fuelled chaos we all needed. MH

PRESS/ FRANCIS DELACROIX

Glam is back, baby!

THE YEAR THAT...

MARILYN MANSON WAS NAMED BY EVAN RACHEL WOOD

In February, a statement posted by actress Evan Rachel Wood would precede a wave of allegations against Marilyn Manson

WORDS: MERLIN ALDERSLADE • PICTURE: GEORGE PIMENTEL/GETTY

It was the most shocking story to hit metal in 2021, and one of the biggest music-related scandals to have broken in the post-#MeToo era. On February 1, Evan Rachel Wood, Hollywood actress, star of TV blockbuster hit *Westworld* and activist, posted an Instagram statement naming Marilyn Manson as the abuser of whom she had spoken in years prior. "The name of my abuser is Brian Warner, also known to the world as Marilyn Manson," her statement read. "He started grooming me when I was a teenager and horrifically abused me for years. I was brainwashed and manipulated into submission. I am done living in fear of retaliation, slander, or blackmail. I am here to expose this dangerous man and call out the many industries that have enabled him, before he ruins any more lives. I stand with the many victims who will no longer be silent."

Following Wood's statement, several other women came forward with their own allegations, including model Sarah McNeilly, artist Gabriella Accarino, actress Ashley Lindsay Morgan and *Game Of Thrones* star Ésme Bianco, who stated in an interview with *The Cut* that Manson threatened her with an axe, cut her with a knife and physically and psychologically abused her during their two-year relationship. "I basically felt like a prisoner," Bianco said. "I came and went at his pleasure. Who I spoke to was completely controlled by him. I called my family hiding in the closet."

In the midst of the allegations, Manson was dropped by his record label, Loma vista Recordings, who stated: "Due to these concerning developments, we have decided not to work with Marilyn Manson on any future projects", and dropped by his longtime manager, Tony Ciulla, who had worked with Manson for more than 25 years. He was also dropped from TV roles in US fantasy series *American Gods* and Shudder's horror anthology series, *Creepshow*. The allegations horrified people across the music industry, with Limp Bizkit guitarist Wes Borland – who spent a brief spell in Manson's band in 2008 – amongst the most high-profile artists to comment, noting: "He's not a great guy and every single thing that people have said about him is fucking true… They are speaking the truth."

Evan Rachel Wood's statement emerged just under three months after *Metal Hammer* published an interview with Marilyn Manson, in which our writer Dave Everley asked the singer directly about Wood's 2019 testimony in front of the California Senate Public Safety Committee. During the testimony, which was presented in support of the Phoenix Act, a proposed law that called for an extension of the statute of limitations on domestic violence crimes , Wood gave details of an abusive relationship, describing acts of "fear, pain, torture and humiliation" carried out against her. Manson refused to answer Dave's questions on the matter, leading to the call being disconnected and *Hammer* receiving no more direct correspondence from the man himself.

The story continued to grow. Following the allegations brought forward by Wood, Bianco, McNeilly and others, *Louder* Editor-In-Chief Briony Edwards conducted an interview with three women who had been doing research into Manson's behaviour and the rumours surrounding his relationships for years. One of them had set up the 'mansonisabusive' Instagram account, highlighting examples of his problematic behaviour over the years and paying particular attention to his relationship with Wood. She has since had to restart the account; it was under the handle 'mansonsabusivebehaviour' at the time of going to press.

Soon after Briony's interview was published in May, it was revealed that Manson's former assistant, Ashley Walters, had filed a lawsuit against the singer, alleging sexual assault, battery and harassment. According to court documents obtained by *The Cut* (and shared by *Rolling Stone*), Walters – who worked for the singer in 2010 and 2011

Ésme Bianco's lawsuit was permitted to go ahead

"I BASICALLY FELT LIKE A PRISONER"

ÉSME BIANCO

Evan Rachel Wood was the first to speak out against Manson

– claimed that Manson physically and psychologically abused her, subjecting her to "personal and professional sexual exploitation, manipulation and psychological abuse". At the end of May, an ex-girlfriend of Manson, known as 'Jane Doe', filed a lawsuit against the singer at Los Angeles County Superior Court, alleging that Manson raped and physically abused her during their relationship. After initially being dismissed on September 14 on statute of limitations grounds, the lawsuit was refiled. The following month, a lawsuit by Esmé Bianco accusing Marilyn Manson of sexual and physical abuse was permitted to proceed after a US District Court judge denied a request by Manson's lawyers to dismiss it. At time of going to press, *Metal Hammer* was yet to hear of any updates on those lawsuits.

Manson released a statement responding to some of the allegations on February 2, claiming: "Obviously, my art and my life have long been magnets for controversy, but these recent claims about me are horrible distortions of reality. My intimate relationships have always been entirely consensual with like-minded partners. Regardless of how – and why – others are now choosing to misrepresent the past, that is the truth." Aside from two bizarre and ill-received public appearances with Kanye West and an accompanying guest spot on the controversial rapper's *Donda* album, Manson has been largely silent since.

EB: ALBERTO E. RODRIGUEZ/GETTY ERW: JEFF KRAVITZ/FILMMAGIC/GETTY

THE YEAR THAT...

BABYMETAL TURNED 10... AND DISAPPEARED

They played 10 anniversary shows at Tokyo's Budokan, and then waved goodbye. *Metal Hammer* Japan editor Takehide Okami was there to see it all happen

WORDS: ELEANOR GOODMAN • TRANSLATION: TOMOHIRO MORIYA

What do Japanese metal fans think about Babymetal, 10 years on?
"The first impression of them was that they were being forced to play heavy metal, even though they'd never heard it. When the first album came out, the girls' singing was very good, so that changed how the critics viewed them. Then when the second and third records came out, the songs weren't only a homage to authentic metal, they were more of the Babymetal world, and *then* traditional metalheads gradually accepted them. There are still some Babymetal fans who think Babymetal are not metal – they are *Babymetal*. So Babymetal are a truly successful band."

How significant is it that they played a run of shows at the 15,000-capacity Budokan, during January–April?
"Maybe people like Paul McCartney could do 10 days at the Budokan, but as far as I know, only Babymetal have done it. The government asked people not to come to Tokyo so some dates weren't sold out, but if it hadn't been for COVID the tickets would've sold out in hours."

Which shows did you go to?
"I went to the first, second and last show. Everybody was excited, but we had restrictions at the venue that no one was allowed to shout out, so it was kind of a difficult and strange situation. We were each given a special mask made of two layers; the first was what medical care workers wear, and the second had a Babymetal design on it."

"BABYMETAL ARE EVOLVING, LIKE GODZILLA"

What was your favourite moment from the three gigs you went to?
"The first night. Babymetal hadn't played for about a year and a half, so even though they are experienced and the band are professional, if you have a long hiatus period, you can't come back at 100%. But, after they played a couple of songs, they did. So that was moving, and I felt something special."

At the final gig, they put up a message on the big screen, saying that the 10-year legend was finished. It sounded like it could be the end of Babymetal. How did fans react?
"Many people thought, 'Oh, this is something big,' but they were sure that it doesn't mean that Babymetal have ended. Nobody was really pessimistic about this. Babymetal went all out in the last 10 years, and it's common for bands to take a break and recharge. In the Godzilla movies, when Godzilla ends his fight, he stops and takes time to evolve to the next step. Something like that is happening to Babymetal. It's like a caterpillar transforming into a butterfly – Babymetal are going to come back as a much more beautiful and stronger butterfly."

What do you think they'll do next?
"On the second and third records, Babymetal showed the Japanese listeners the trends of the heavy metal world. So maybe for the next record they'll go back to the basics of very straight-ahead metal, or back to some kind of a teen idol element. Something really interesting could happen." MH

PRESS

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THE YEAR THAT...

DOWNLOAD RETURNED

(WELL, KINDA)

Enter Shikari light up the night

Arriving out of nowhere and giving us the most emotional weekend of the summer, Download Pilot gave us hope for festival season

WORDS: MERLIN ALDERSLADE • PICTURES: KEVIN NIXON

With the live music industry still in tatters due to the ongoing affects of the pandemic, the immediate future for festivals looked pretty grim as summer began to peep over the horizon. Various small festivals had taken place across the UK during 2020 and 2021 so far, but they were largely intimate, independent affairs, often having to follow strict guidelines and feeling a world away from the festival experiences we'd all grown used to. The idea of a fully-fledged fest filled with a few thousand moshing, sweating, screaming rock fans seemed a lifetime away.

Then, out of nowhere, hope appeared. On May 26, Live Nation announced that it would be hosting a special 'Pilot' version of Download Festival, comprising 10,000 camping fans, a bill of around 40 British rock and metal acts and – most astonishingly of all – *no* social distancing or masks required within the grounds of the festival itself. The dates of this historic, landmark event? June 18-20 – barely three weeks after the announcement. Oh, boy.

"We heard there was some rumours that the government wanted to look at doing a camping pilot event in June," Live Nation's Kamran Haq told us, "but we didn't know for sure it was going to be Download until the middle of May. It was literally four weeks before the actual event happened that we got the go-ahead!"

Given the main event takes a full year to put together, even a 'slimmed-down' version of Download seemed nigh-on impossible to build in a matter of weeks. And yet, emails began to be sent, frantic phonecalls began to happen, and sure enough, the UK's first major outdoor festival for two years was on.

"Speaking to the agents and managers at the time, they thought we were having a laugh," Kam chuckled. "They're like, 'You're joking with us, you're not gonna actually do this, are you?' Like, 'Yeah, it's happening, this is really happening!' We had to explain to them the whole situation, that it was a government pilot event and we were literally gonna do it in four weeks' time."

"I got the call from our agent, and he was like, 'There's just been a meeting between the Download festival organisers and the government events team,'" says While She Sleeps guitarist Mat Welsh. "[He told us], 'They've been allowed to do the Pilot.' I immediately was like, 'Get us that fucking show. What do we need to do to do it?' It was

"IT'S SOMETHING I'LL REMEMBER FOR THE REST OF MY LIFE"

KADEEM FRANCE, LOATHE

BFMV get their long-awaited headline slot

Frank Carter & The Rattlesnakes: making hissstory

Skindred's Benji Webbe oversees a much-missed Newport Helicopter

Employed To Serve's Justine Jones: back where she belongs onstage

an absolute no-brainer – I would have walked there."

"We got the call with the offer and like any artist we snatched their hand off," says Enter Shikari frontman Rou Reynolds. The Hertfordshire electro-punks were booked to headline the Saturday night of the festival – their first Download headline slot. "We'd play anywhere for anyone at [that] point," he adds with a laugh. "I think at first I didn't believe it. I was like, 'This isn't gonna happen.' We had heard about a few other things, like test events, that actually got cancelled. It got closer and closer, and we started rehearsing and working out how to be a live band again after this extended, enforced period of hibernation, and it just became more and more real."

Bleed From Within's Scott Kennedy makes up for lost time

And so, on June 18, 2021, the gates of Donington did indeed open again, and 10,000 eager rock fans sprinted onto the field for one of the most unique, memorable and straight-up emotional weekends in the history of British music.

"How do I even put it into words?" says Loathe frontman Kadeem France, whose band played the main stage on the Saturday. "Overwhelming, amazing, incredible. Seeing so many faces after being in a practice room for the past year and just playing to my bandmates was just surreal. I think it's something I'll remember for the rest of my life."

If the rush of seeing live music again wasn't enough, there was something particularly special about experiencing a festival under the Download banner that was overwhelmingly populated by young, hungry, British bands. In a post-Brexit climate, this really was a much-needed reminder of something we can be proud of in this country – an exciting, vibrant rock scene. And it gave dozens of great bands the chance to grab some career-defining moments.

"Honestly, it was unreal," says Kam. "I got a bit teary-eyed just watching Malevolence do a circle pit. I was like, 'Wow, I've missed this!' It's something like I said before: it's been 16 months since I've seen anything like this, a proper live show, with no masks, no social distancing, and actual moshpits. At one moment I was watching Frank Turner with his tour manager, and she started literally bawling her eyes out and it started me off as well. Like, 'Oh god, I can't believe I'm bawling my eyes out to Frank Turner here!' It was really emotional."

As the final notes of a fabulously nostalgic and celebratory Bullet For My Valentine headline set pulled the curtain down on the weekend, it was clear that Download Pilot had not only given us an injection of some much-needed live medicine, it had given us some real hope for the future of live music in the middle of a pandemic that had, until this point, changed everything. Here's hoping we get the full, Godzilla-sized Download Festival back where it belongs next year. H

We lost Joey far too young

THE YEAR THAT...

WE LOST JOEY JORDISON

Co-founder of the 'Knot, extreme metal super-fan and a 21st century icon. Sinsaenum bandmate Frédéric Leclercq pays tribute

WORDS: STEPHEN HILL • PICTURE: JESSE WILD/RHYTHM MAGAZINE

In July, we received devastating news: Joey Jordison, legendary drummer and one of the architects of modern metal, had passed away, aged 46. As co-founder of Slipknot, he'd brought his love of the extreme to the mainstream, churning out inhumanly fast beats that still had groove, and thrilling onstage in a rotating kit. A sidestep into glam for Murderdolls only made us love him more. Though it was a blow when he parted ways with Slipknot in 2013, he later revealed he'd been dealing with a neurological health condition called transverse myelitis. Despite this, he continued to make music with his bands Vimic and Sinsaenum. Sinsaenum mastermind/guitarist (and ex-Dragonforce/current Kreator bassist) Frédéric Leclercq explains how the band came together, and what makes Joey such an icon.

"I first heard Joey's drumming in 2001, because my friend had a Slipknot DVD. I didn't like the fact they were wearing masks, so I was like, 'Yeah, that's OK.' I didn't want to admit that it was good.

"The first time we met, I was in Dragonforce and we were in the Netherlands, and me and Sam [Totman], our guitarist, were just drunk and making fun of everyone. So, Joey was there and we went, 'Hey dude, you are a Maggot!' and he went, 'Yeah, that's what we call our fans', and we went, 'No, no, no! YOU are a maggot!' and he was, again, 'Yeah, guys, that's what we call our fans.' And that was it, it wasn't very evil.

"So, fast-forward a year when we were touring with them. I heard the intensity of his playing, and that was the first time I really appreciated him. I met Paul [Gray, late Slipknot bassist] and he said to me, 'I am the bass player in Slipknot', and I said, 'No, you're not!' and he told me again that he was. I said that if he was, then he could get me in the dressing room, and if he did, then I'd buy him a beer – so he just marched me into their dressing room. Joey was next door and he called me over all serious, like, 'Hey you! I remember you. I remember what you said about being a Maggot. Don't fuck with Slipknot!', and I was like, 'Wow! What a cunt!'.

"But Joey had got that out of his system and that was it. After that, he started telling me how much he liked death metal and I was also telling him how much I loved it as well. I said, 'My favourite band is Morbid Angel' and he was like, 'Oh, me too!' and that's really how it started. He gave me a book on death metal, and said, 'I'll give you that, but please return it in mint condition!' That's when we just started to call each other using [the words] 'Morbid Angel' to say hi to each other."

"One day I was coming back from a tour of Australia, and I got the text: 'Morbid Angel.' I was in the process of creating Sinsaenum and looking for a drummer. I thought it was a sign from the gods, and I said, 'Funnily enough, speaking about Morbid Angel, we have a new band and we need a drummer…'

Sinsaenum: Joey and Frédéric bonded over their mutual love of death metal

"Joey had total freedom when it came to recording. For the first album, *Echoes Of The Tortured*, I pieced the songs together and he recorded everything in Iowa. On *Repulsion For Humanity*, he came to France and helped me work on the songs, even on the guitar. The title track has this chunky guitar part in the middle and that was him. He said, 'Oh, we're missing that Suffocation-style chug-chug-chug-chug part here', and I picked up my guitar and played it!

"He even came up with the name. I wanted to call the band Dead Souls, which was pretty unoriginal. He first came up with the name Vulture Cult, which is such a cool name, but there was already a Vulture Cult. Then he wanted to call it Mummy Bag! Which was shit! Then one day he said he woke up and it just came to him: sin, insane and asylum… and let's put a backwards A in there as well! Ha ha!

"We had been in touch only a few weeks before he died. [Co-vocalist] Sean Zatorsky and I worked on some material and we said, 'Shall we send it over to Joey?', and Sean did, and he got back to him immediately and was super-excited.

"Joey called me and asked me to send him something as well, which I did. I asked if he liked it and he didn't reply, so I sent another question mark, and he got back to me and said: 'Morbid Angel, it's all good, I just wish I could fly.' I didn't really understand, so I said, 'Oh yeah, I'm flying soon, I'm doing some shows with Kreator.' And he replied, 'No, I mean I wish I could fly like an angel.' It felt really out of character, and that was the last text I got from him. Looking back now, it's kinda beautiful." MH

Despite his other excellent bands, Joey Jordison will always be best remembered as part of Slipknot

"I HEARD THE INTENSITY OF HIS PLAYING. I REALLY APPRECIATED HIM"

FRÉDÉRIC LECLERCQ

INSETS: PRESS

THE YEAR THAT... IRON MAIDEN RETURNED

It was the biggest metal story of the year, and with spectacular new album *Senjutsu*, Eddie and the boys showed us it had been worth the wait

WORDS: MERLIN ALDERSLADE

Six years is just cruel. Alright, so technically we *have* had plenty of Iron Maiden action since the release of 2015's bombastic, two-disc monolith, *The Book Of Souls*. There was, of course, the accompanying world tour for that album, taking in stints everywhere from Donington to Mexico City. There was the release of the excellent *Legacy Of The Beast* videogame. There was the immense Legacy Of The Beast tour, pulling together one of the all-time great, career-spanning Maiden setlists, and the show to match. We've had two live albums. Reissues. New Trooper beers. Pop! Vinyls. A *pinball machine*, for fuck's sake. And yet, come the start of 2021, that nagging sensation that we were missing something continued to grow. Come September, it'd have been *six years* since a new, fully fledged Maiden studio album.

While there had long been rumours and musings of something new being worked on somewhere in the midst of Maiden World, as the year rolled on, we still had no concrete information about the 17th Maiden record. Bruce Dickinson had dropped a fair few hints along the way – not least in November 2020 when he revealed the band had "been working together a little bit in the studio". Still, for the first few months, it was mostly radio silence, save for a few very subtle signs tossed into the ether (more on that later). Then, out of nowhere, things started happening.

On June 28, Bruce appeared on Sky News, plugging his one-man spoken word tour due to take place later in the year. While most of the press around the interview focused on the singer's comments around Brexit, more eagle-eyed fans spotted something rather curious. Bruce was sporting a t-shirt that appeared to have the same design as a bunch of flyers that had been seen scattered around Download Pilot a couple of weeks prior. The design sported the words 'BELSHAZZAR'S FEAST' – a reference, presumably, to a biblical tale from the Book Of Daniel, which gave birth to the phrase 'the writing on the wall'. A new band Bruce happened to be high on? Possibly – but then the plot thickened. Firstly, it was noted that the Belshazzar's Feast graphic had the numbers 15/07 and the Roman numerals IMXVII. July 15, perhaps? Iron Maiden 17, as in 17th studio album? The clues seemed to match up.

Finally, some particularly savvy fans noticed that the tour art for the latest leg of Iron Maiden's Legacy Of The Beast tour – released months earlier – featured some graffiti subtly tucked away on a wall – 'WOTW'. Quite literally, Writing On The Wall. It seemed inevitable: new Maiden music was coming.

"THERE'S ALWAYS SOMETHING NEW COMING"

JANICK GERS

Things began to accelerate. On July 9, a short video was posted, featuring Bruce proclaiming that we were all indeed invited to Belshazzar's Feast on July 15. Sure enough, a holding video was posted on their Youtube channel as the hype began to build. At 6pm on July 15, we finally got what we'd all been waiting for: the first new slice of Iron Maiden music in six years. A brand new video and single, *The Writing On The Wall* (well, what else would it be called?!), was unveiled. A six-minute slab of Maiden as we'd never quite heard them before, it eschewed the traditional gallop and bluster of a Maiden lead single in favour of a more methodical, menacing blend of dark, medieval folk and outlaw country bluster, all underpinned by some searing, classic Maiden melodies and a snarling, seething vocal delivery by Bruce. Soon after, Maiden's next chapter was officially revealed: *Senjutsu*, their new album, featuring an all-time great Eddie dolled up as a menacing, samurai warrior, would land on September 3.

"You go out every time and make the best record you possibly can at that particular time," says guitarist Janick Gers. "You go in with the best intentions and give everything you've got, and this one is no exception. There's some amazing stuff on there."

He isn't kidding – *Senjutsu* turned out to be an imperious, all-conquering, two-disc, 80-minute monster, awarded a glowing 9/10 review by *Hammer*'s Joe Daly and received voraciously by Maiden's fans. What was even more amazing, however, was the reveal that the album had actually been completed for *two years*, and had been lying in a vault since its completion, with even the band not getting to hear it until it was nearing release time. "*Senjutsu* hasn't been so long in the making, just long in the waiting!" Bruce chuckled in our exclusive cover interview back in August. It meant that Maiden – much like most of the world – had been forced into an unplanned break, leaving them more gagging than ever to get back on tour, finish up the Legacy Of The Beast dates and, then, get the *Senjutsu* era properly on the road. Luckily, they're still as up for it as ever.

"I think Maiden's still a valid band, both in the touring sense and the recording sense," muses Janick. "There's always something new coming. That's important – when you have a band that's actively creative. Obviously, we've got quite a big tour of Europe coming up, and Donington to go with it, so these are very exciting times. We're excited about doing it all and getting back on the road, and as you say, we're not getting any younger. You've got to live for today, that's my attitude."

If 2021 proved anything, it's that Iron Maiden are going nowhere. Thank Eddie for that.

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IRON MAIDEN

Eddie's baaaack!

THE YEAR THAT...

SLIPKNOT GOT BACK IN THE SADDLE

From new music and new masks to returning to the stage and beefing with rappers, it was a busy ol' time for The Nine

WORDS: MERLIN ALDERSLADE

The Nine: always incendiary

While the first part of 2021 was relatively quiet for Slipknot, come the end of the year they'd managed to squeeze in 27 live shows, a new song, updated masks, a historic livestream and a bizarre feud with rapper-come-pop punk-aping wally, Machine Gun Kelly.

As Corey was busy touring his *CMFT* album across the States in the spring, his 'Knot bandmate Shawn 'Clown' Crahan was beginning to lift the lid on what had been happening with Slipknot in the studio. In May, he confirmed that Slipknot were indeed working on something new, some of the band having seemingly convened in LA to make what Clown described as "God music".

"Some of the most incredible music is happening," he explained to *Metal Hammer* soon after. "This one is a cobra in a basket."

Despite the anticipation starting to build, it'd be a few more months before Slipknot could officially pick up business again, returning to the stage for the first time in over 18 months at Rocklahoma Festival in Oklahoma on September 4. As well as offering a chance to dust off a ream of Slipknot classics and a clutch of more recent hits, the Rocklahoma show was also notable for debuting a brand new mask for Corey. Gone was the plasticy, translucent visage of the *We Are Not Your Kind* era; in its place was a vision that looked like a nightmarish mash-up of the *Vol. 3* and *All Hope Is Gone*-era masks. "It's little bits and pieces of things that have intrigued me, of masks that I've had in the past," Corey told Lazer 103.3. "And it [has] a devil-may-care kind of terror to it." Jay Weinberg and V-Man would also debut new masks soon after.

As Slipknot's live return rolled into Riot Fest a couple of weeks later, the most unexpected music feud of the year kicked off as Machine Gun Kelly inexplicably decided to take pot shots at the Iowans during his own set at the Chicago festival. Referring to the band as "50-year-olds wearing a fucking weird mask on a fucking stage," MGK courted the wrath of Metal Twitter, prompting him to blame the outburst on a "fucking terrible" verse that Corey produced for a guest spot on Kelly's *Downfall* album. Corey would respond with "receipts", claiming that he had, in fact, rejected the opportunity to appear on the record owing to others attempting to co-write his verse. "I said no to them," he stated, posting a screenshot for proof.

Corey and MGK's feuding may have entertained the rock media for a week or two, but it'd be the following few weeks that'd truly define Slipknot's year. On November 5, they released their first new single for two years.

"SOME INCREDIBLE MUSIC IS HAPPENING"

CLOWN

MGK tried to take on Corey and co. Fail

Titled *The Chapeltown Rag*, it was a classic slice of Slipknot heaviness based on the infamous case of serial killer Peter Sutcliffe – AKA 'The Yorkshire Ripper'. The song would get its live airing at what was arguably the crowning achievement of Slipknot's 2021, a headline set at Knotfest LA at the Banc Of California Stadium, in front of tens of thousands of screaming Maggots. Streamed live, it was a celebratory climax to a year that reaffirmed Des Moines' finest as one of metal's most enduringly vital forces.

SLIPKNOT: PRESS/STEVE THRASHER. MACHINE GUN KELLY: GETTY.

THE YEAR THAT...

LIMP BIZKIT EMBRACED THEIR DAD VIBES

As nu metal officially became cool again, Fred Durst broke the internet twice – once with a new look, and again with a brand new Bizkit album

WORDS: MERLIN ALDERSLADE

Two decades since it ruled the world, nu metal emerging as one of the defining forces of 2021 seemed unlikely to say the least. And yet, be it through the likes of Spiritbox, Employed To Serve and Tetrarch channelling some of the movement's biggest acts on their latest albums, Mudvayne reuniting to headline major US festivals or Papa Roach teaming up with a TikTok star for a 'reloaded' version of *Last Resort*, nu metal's shadow was looming large again.

Most significant of all, though, was the resurrection of Limp Bizkit. While the days of Fred Durst et al being metal's whipping boys are long dead, it's fair to say that it'd been some time since Bizkit did anything particularly newsworthy, with no new album for 10 years and a status, it seemed, confined to busting out occasional tours and relying on classic hits.

Not this year. On July 31, Limp Bizkit's entire Lollapalooza set was streamed online, reminding many fans of just why they remain one of the funnest live bands of their (g-g-)generation and causing demand for international dates to go through the roof. But the biggest talking point? Fred Durst swaggering out onto the stage looking like something out of a 70s cop show, proudly embracing his 'dad vibes' and paving the way for an unexpected new chapter. Suddenly, for the first time in far too long, everyone was talking about Limp Bizkit again.

"First of all, people don't understand that Fred Durst is a freakin' genius," chuckles Tetrarch guitarist Diamond Rowe, whose band released their excellent, nu metal-heavy *Unstable* album this year. "People think he's this dumb dude, but Fred Durst plays all of y'all. He's so smart, he knows how to market perfectly and he knows what people want to hear from his band. He had that whole 'dad vibes' thing, the whole look that makes people talk. Everyone's like, 'Why does he do that?' I'm like, 'Well, you're talking about it, that's why he did it!'"

Sure enough, the *Dad Vibes* single was released soon after, increasing expectation that we might get the first Limp Bizkit album since 2011's *Gold Cobra*. When Bizkit decided to pull the rest of their US dates in the face of the ongoing pandemic, many wondered if the next phase would be put on hold. Not so. In October, Fred began teasing the release of more new tracks, eventually revealing that a whole new Limp Bizkit album, *Still Sucks*, would be dropping on Halloween. It was official: Bizkit were back.

"It was the right time and with the right minds, you know?" says Diamond. "Nu metal does have that little resurgence thing going on right now, [Bizkit] dropped the Lollapalooza performance right at a time when people wanna look at it… maybe five or six years ago, everyone would have been like, 'Urgh, Limp Bizkit, who cares?' But now we're at a point where people wanna respect nu metal again, so it was a good time for them to do that. And honestly, the new album is sick!"

Limp Bizkit: masters of good timing

"FRED DURST PLAYS ALL OF Y'ALL"

DIAMOND ROWE, TETRARCH

GETTY, DIAMOND: PRESS

THE 50 BEST ALBUMS OF 2021

FOR ALL OUR CONTRIBUTORS' INDIVIDUAL LISTS, HEAD TO WWW.METALHAMMER.COM

As voted for by our esteemed team of critics, these are the 50 albums that defined 12 months of metal. Strap in...

WORDS: MERLIN ALDERSLADE, CHRIS CHANTLER, ALEC CHILLINGWORTH, JOE DALY, ALEX DELLER, DAVE EVERLEY, ELEANOR GOODMAN, CONNIE GORDON, STEPHEN HILL, RICH HOBSON, DOM LAWSON, ELLIOT LEAVER, DANNII LEIVERS, SOPHIE MAUGHAN, MATT MILLS, ADAM REES, JONATHAN SELZER, KEZ WHELAN

50 DREAM THEATER
A View From The Top Of The World

INSIDEOUT

After returning to classic form on 2019's *Distance Over Time*, Dream Theater were in a buoyant mood on their 15th full-length. As intricate and technically dazzling as ever, songs like the grandiose *The Alien* and the brooding *Invisible Monster* delivered the virtuoso goods with giant melodies attached. Meanwhile, the title track offered 20 minutes of wildly imaginative, cross-genre showboating and was easily identifiable as one of the greatest Dream Theater epics yet.

49 WHITECHAPEL
Kin

METAL BLADE

On their eighth studio venture, the Tennessee deathcore progenitors would blaze yet another evolutionary trail, picking up where 2019 confessional *The Valley* left off. Bludgeoning yet beautiful, Phil Bozeman vacillated between guttural barks and soaring cleans as folk-infused acoustics intertwined with hulking DM grooves. Tracks like *A Bloodsoaked Symphony* and *Lost Boy* managed to punch you in both the face and the feels. A flawless companion piece to its predecessor, *Kin* was one of 2021's most intense listening experiences.

48 OPHIDIAN I
Desolate

SEASON OF MIST

A fine line separates those able to make a million notes played in confined sonic spaces listenable from those who sound like a music store upchucking into a bin. *Desolate*, the second album by these Icelandic prog/tech-death maestros, fell on the good guys' side of that divide as it tempered ridiculous skill, technique, and musical and physical gymnastics with impressive songwriting sensibilities. Listeners were humming along at a million miles an hour, loudly, proudly and repeatedly.

47 THE BODY AND BIG | BRAVE
Leaving None But Small Birds

THRILL JOCKEY

Who'd have thought this pairing between sludge metal's most misanthropic duo The Body and avant Canadian post-rock trio Big | Brave would sound this unabashedly gorgeous? Eschewing the deafening volume that both usually reside within, *Leaving None But Small Birds* harked back to Big | Brave's folkier roots but imbued them with a rich, almost classic rock vibe, featuring Robin Wattie's most expressive vocals to date. A collaboration in the truest sense, this emotive record was much more than the sum of its parts.

46 CRADLE OF FILTH
Existence Is Futile

NUCLEAR BLAST

A debut for new keyboardist/vocalist Anabelle Iratni and a conceptual approach laced with unwrapping the existential crisis affecting us all as the world plunges further into madness, *Existence Is Futile* was another fine showing from a band who have been on imperious form for more than a decade. Catchy, evil and buckets of fun, the album produced an all-time-great Cradle Of Filth single in the driving *Crawling King Chaos*, and even brought back longtime Cradle fave Doug Bradley. What wasn't to love?

45 DORDEDUH
Har

PROPHECY PRODUCTIONS

Considering Dordeduh were former members of Negură Bunget, that their second album, *Har*, was enthralling shouldn't come as much of a surprise – and yet it proved to be a revelatory experience. *Har* was a masterclass in how to take a black metal core and use it as the lynchpin for an expansive, melodic and destructive journey through extreme music and beyond. The Transylvanians might have taken nine years to give us a second album, but it was certainly worth the wait.

44 TIMES OF GRACE
Songs Of Loss And Separation

WICKED GOOD

A decade on from their last Times Of Grace album, Killswitch buddies Jesse Leach and Adam D dusted off their side-project for a fresh collection of beautifully written, passionately sung, emotionally raw tunes. Sure, there were moments where the lines between Killswitch and Times Of Grace blurred – *Rescue* could have easily been nicked from the *Incarnate* sessions – but overall, *Songs Of Loss And Separation* brought some different colours to the canvas of these two metal veterans. And in some style.

43 PUPIL SLICER
Mirrors

PROSTHETIC

Grindcore, math-rock and societal outrage were the components that drove the London trio's debut album. All were elements that had been mined before in metal, but few have resulted in such a scabrously visceral and scathing record as we got with *Mirrors*. The fact that this level of volume, technical wizardry and sheer unadulterated anger was being made by a mere three people was astounding. Pupil Slicer have the tools to evolve even further, but as an opening shot, *Mirrors* was some achievement.

The wolf pack will return to UK shores in 2022

POWERWOLF

When their tour dates were paused, the lycanthrope-loving Germans hit the studio to make a defiantly bombastic album

WORDS: DOM LAWSON

There are few things more frustrating than having your momentum halted. Powerwolf have been steadily building their reputation for 18 years and are one of the biggest metal bands in Europe right now. Unfortunately, being absurdly popular was no defence against a global pandemic, and so the Germans' usually extensive touring plans have been in a state of pyro-free limbo since March 2020. Fortunately, Powerwolf did have the release of their eighth studio album, *Call Of The Wild*, to keep them busy this year. As keyboard maestro and back-up frontman Falk Maria Schlegel explains, 2021 has been simultaneously epic and infuriating.

"Before all this pandemic stuff happened, we did have that feeling of momentum. And so it's been like a nightmare. Sometimes I worry that people have waited so long to see us, that when we return there'll be nobody left! Luckily, the release of the album in the summer gave us a really good feeling. In Germany we were in the album charts for 15 weeks! So that proves that the fans are out there and still supporting us, and hopefully the nightmare will never come true! Ha ha ha!"

Quite possibly the most bombastic and hook-stuffed demonstration of their heavy metal prowess yet, *Call Of The Wild* has repeated and perhaps even already surpassed the startling commercial success of 2018's *The Sacrament Of Sin*.

"IT'S BEEN LIKE A NIGHTMARE!"

FALK MARIA SCHLEGEL

Despite a lack of live shows to get the blood flowing, Powerwolf's creative instincts have been as reliable as ever.

"In terms of recording the album, it wasn't exactly *easy*, but there were no real problems," Falk shrugs. "We need the energy from the live shows, but when we wrote this album, there was a strong 'now or never' feeling. No one was sad or depressed. We all went into it with great energy and pure heavy metal!"

Denied the chance to hit the road with their new songs, Powerwolf have spent most of 2021 trying to ensure that *next* year is an unforgettable lap of honour. More importantly, somebody needs to let Falk Maria Schlegel onto a stage before he pops. "Oh man, I *need* a fucking show… I *need* it!" he implores. "That's *home* for me."

They'll play Russia, summer festivals – including Download – and two shows with Iron Maiden in Germany, before hitting Europe and London's Roundhouse in November 2022. "We started at the Underworld in Camden and now we have the Roundhouse, so things have definitely improved! The Brexit situation makes it harder to visit you guys, but of course we want to increase our touring activities in the UK."

Extravagant live shows and triple album sets seem to come as second nature to Powerwolf, so fans keep raising their expectations. As 2022 looms, Falk's main concern is that his band will maintain that precious momentum and keep pursuing a heartfelt policy of "more is more"…

"Unfortunately we have to keep making everything bigger!" Falk laughs. "To *keep* doing more is difficult, but I'm quite optimistic that we can achieve that again and again. Let's see what we come up with next time!"

PRESS/MATTEO FABBIANI/VD PICTURES

42 KK'S PRIEST
Sermons Of The Sinner

EX1

In the year he turned 70, Judas Priest co-founder KK Downing thrust himself back to the forefront of heavy metal with this studded leather asteroid of an LP, welcoming back the fiery lungs of Tim 'Ripper' Owens. After 10 years away from metal, KK sounded hungry and motivated, with a Mustaine-like impetus to best his former bandmates pushing energy levels to such heights, you struggled to believe this guitarist was born a day after Winston Churchill won his first general election.

41 POWERWOLF
Call Of The Wild

NAPALM

Saarbrücken's finest sealed their position as modern power metal's top dogs with their eighth album. All the elements that made them so successful were present, from the massive choruses and OTT flourishes to the vulpine references and obligatory sauciness with a side-order of blasphemy – in this case *Undress To Confess*. But there was also a seam of seriousness amid the bombast; the uncharacteristically seething *Glaubenskraft* (roughly 'The Power Of Faith') addressed the lack of abuse-related accountability within the church. These wolves showed their fangs.

40 PERTURBATOR
Lustful Sacraments

BLOOD MUSIC

Proclaiming that synthwave was dead and recasting himself as some kind of futuristic goth, Perturbator – aka James Kent – dreamt up a fictitious city aptly named Xanadu, in which citizens had free rein to indulge their desires however they wanted. Inspired by the industrial music of DAF and Front 242, as well as The Cure, The Sisters Of Mercy and Killing Joke, the new sonic open world of *Lustful Sacraments* felt decadent and thrilling – like the beginning of the scene that spawned him.

39 BOSS KELOID
Family The Smiling Thrush

RIPPLE MUSIC

Audibly operating in a field of one, Wigan crew Boss Keloid make music that defies rational description. Imbued with an

emotional undertow that could easily level an entire block of buildings, the band's fifth album was also perverse, bewildering and richly psychedelic. Part kaleidoscopic doom, part freewheeling prog, *Family The Smiling Thrush* was a vivid journey through giant crescendos *and* unfathomable intricacy, with frontman Alex Hurst's thunderous but soulful baritone providing the human glue that holds all those extraordinary ideas together. Here was genius.

38 DVNE
Etemen Ænka
METAL BLADE

This Scottish quintet entered 2021 as relative unknowns but emerged as one of metal's brightest forward-thinkers, such was the brilliance of their second album. *Etemen Ænka* lived at the convergence of sludge, prog and post-metal, experimenting with flamboyant licks without sacrificing that bedrock of leaden heaviness. Vocals ranged from ethereal cleans to hellish grunts, while Evelyn May's synths and distant cries added an aptly sci-fi-sounding sheen. As a result of that aggressive innovation, Dvne rocketed from the underground to the undeniable.

37 DIVIDE AND DISSOLVE
Gas Lit
INVADA

Much like the indigenous experience it documented, *Gas Lit* felt simultaneously displaced and deeply rooted. Takiaya Reed and Sylvie Nehill's orphaned, sax-driven ambiences and tectonic plate-shifting doom resonated as both a long-gestated uprising and a psychic residue siphoned from a year in isolation. *Gas Lit* was potent, unnerving and, in poet Minori Sanchiz-Fung's semi-robotic spoken-word contribution to *Did You Have Something To Do With It*, host to one of the most oddly affecting moments of the year.

36 THE ARMED
Ultrapop
SARGENT HOUSE

The Armed have become a cult band during their decade and a bit of existence, and on their fourth full-length they managed to both intensify their enigmatic appeal, while also bringing

Between The Buried And Me were absolutely vivid in 2021

PRESS/JUAN PARDO

GAMES OF THE YEAR

All the titles that pushed our buttons

WORDS: JOSH WEST. FOR MORE GAMES ACTION, SEE WWW.GAMESRADAR.COM

DEATHLOOP
ARKANE
One of the most inventive games of the year. A magnificent murder puzzle trapped in a time loop, the cycle continued until you assassinated eight targets in a single day.

PSYCHONAUTS 2
DOUBLE FINE
Cameos from Jack Black and Elijah Wood were the icing on the cake of this psychedelic mindtrip of an adventure.

MARVEL'S GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY
EIDOS MONTREAL
A fun adventure with some of our favourite superheroes, with a killer classic rock playlist to boot, *Guardians Of The Galaxy* was a riot from start to finish.

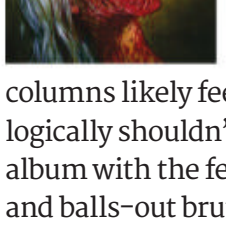
RESIDENT EVIL VILLAGE
CAPCOM
Resident Evil Village was the *Evil Dead 2* of videogames. An absurdist, frequently hilarious, and surprisingly violent battle against evil spirits, towering vampires, and an army of killer werewolves.

HITMAN 3
IO INTERACTIVE
Hitman 3 was the ultimate murder sandbox. If you had a few hours to spare, you could stick on your favourite EP and let yourself run riot around some of the most beautiful, expansive playgrounds of the year.

in a whole new bunch of fans. *Ultrapop* was a strange record from a very strange band; art hardcore and pure white noise vied for your attention alongside 80s synths and glam pop bombast. But ultimately, The Armed did a stunning job of making cohesion from chaos.

35 BETWEEN THE BURIED AND ME
Colors II

SUMERIAN



Mother Nature might be hard-pressed to get lightning to hit the same place twice, but Between The Buried And Me did it all on their own with *Colors II*, the mindblowing sequel to their 2007 masterpiece. Critics and fans united in lofty praise for the band's most mature and affecting release yet. Stacked with surging death metal riffs, frenetic tempo changes and the jaw-dropping interplay of guitarists Paul Waggoner and Dustie Waring, *Colors II* delivered 78 unrelenting minutes of sublime prog metal ecstasy.

34 CANNIBAL CORPSE
Violence Unimagined

METAL BLADE

A band nearly 35 years into a career, with its members all chronologically north of 50 (and upper spinal and neck columns likely feeling more like 90), logically shouldn't have created an album with the ferocity, precision and balls-out brutality of *Violence Unimagined*. But, with the inclusion of Hate Eternal guitarist/producer Erik Rutan injecting additional blood-splattered energy where it didn't even appear to be needed, death metal's greatest band delivered the 15th sequel to horror's greatest franchise.

33 JINJER
Wallflowers

NAPALM

The Ukrainian upstarts had already taken flight with 2019's stunning *Macro*, but fourth album *Wallflowers* sent them soaring into the heavens with a terrifying juggernaut of riffs and blastbeats across 50 minutes of bludgeoning, progressive tech metal. The cherry on the cake was how every single track on the album was delivered with the concentrated rage of a band who have had to fight their

PRESS/CLÉMENT THIERY

Jinjer took a chance and it paid off big time

JINJER

The Ukrainian metal sensations bet the house on a new album and a massive tour – and it paid off handsomely

WORDS: RICH HOBSON

From escaping warzones to embarking on a seemingly never-ending tour around the planet, Jinjer's story has largely been defined by momentum, crowds growing with each passing year as they fast became one of metal's hottest new names. Though forced to cancel their 2020 tour plans amid the pandemic, the band rallied to come back with *Wallflowers*, their most creatively ambitious and commercially successful album to date.

"Not being able to tour was a huge blow for us," admits vocalist Tatiana Shmayluk. "We were definitely frustrated that we weren't able to tour and promote our last album, *Macro*, more, but we knew we couldn't just sit around and wait for everything to open back up, either. We laid a huge bet on releasing another album while lots of places were still locked down, and an even bigger bet on trying to tour the US. As it turns out though, we made the right choice."

With sold-out shows across both the US and Europe and *Wallflowers* making in-roads into the charts (including a Top 10 position in Germany, where it landed at No. 7), 2021 saw Jinjer's momentum return with a vengeance, though not without some setbacks along the way. "We tried three times before we flew to the US," Tatiana says. "COVID added to an already complicated US immigration policy, which has tons of ever-changing restrictions, so they turned us back twice. When we finally made it out of Ukraine I was over the moon. Then Vlad [Ulasevich, drums] tested positive for COVID, though asymptomatic. We ended up playing some dates using his live drum tracks from the Euroblast Festival in Cologne – we won't be stopped!"

> **"I'VE BEEN BROUGHT BACK TO LIFE"**
> TATIANA SHMAYLUK

Though their sonic evolution may have its detractors ("There's always someone that wishes a band's sound won't change, but we never wanted to be the next AC/DC," Tatiana says, dismissively), *Wallflowers* pushed the band's fusion of tech metal virtuosity, prog metal ambition and extreme metal brutality to ever-greater heights, cementing Jinjer as a band that are inspiring a whole new generation of metal fans.

"It means so much to us as a band and as individuals to hear people look up to us," Tatiana says. "The best advice we can offer is that anything and everything is possible, just keep on dreaming. We literally come from the poorest place in Europe; none of us should be where we are now, but we pushed our way through."

The band have already lined up a string of festival appearances for 2022, including Graspop, Hellfest and Bloodstock, but right now they have their sights set on a rare change of pace… "A rest!" Tatiana says. "It's what we deserve after such a long tour, but already 2022 is filling up with our Latin American tour and then summer festival season right after… it's going to be crazy. Now we're able to go back onstage in front of thousands of fans, it's something that we value much more than before the pandemic. I honestly feel I am being brought back to life again."

entire lives, both personally and professionally. An overwhelming triumph, *Wallflowers* was one of the angriest records of 2021.

32 EVERY TIME I DIE
Radical

EPITAPH

Fifty-one minutes long and not a single second of it wasted, *Radical* crept out of Every Time I Die's comfort zones more than a few times – we're still loving those subtle Deftones-meets-Tool-isms sewn delicately into the maelstrom of *White Void* – but ultimately, it was more of what everyone loves so much about this band: mercilessly big riffs, hooks aplenty and lyrical call-outs tailor-made for creating pandemonium in a moshpit. Worth the five-year wait? You bet your ass.

31 THE WILDHEARTS
21st Century Love Songs

GRAPHITE

Following up 2019's widely acclaimed *Renaissance Men* would have been tricky for some bands, but The Wildhearts simply fired up the riff generator and smashed out another flawless display of anarchic hard rock brilliance. Almost overburdened with killer hooks and giant choruses, *21st Century Love Songs* was also one of the Brits' gnarliest and most subversive records yet, with bursts of churning noise rock, wonky art-punk detours and an indecent number of bludgeoning, angular riffs. The Wildhearts are the UK's greatest rock band. Still.

30 KING WOMAN
Celestial Blues

RELAPSE

King Woman's second full-length release was a dark and majestic thing, capable of bringing Christ crashing down and reinstating devils amongst the ranks of the angels. Project mastermind Kristina Esfandiari was on apocalyptic form, showcasing the tremendous versatility of her voice, songwriting and vision as she delivered one standout 'WTF?!' performance after another. Whether they were doom, shoegaze, grunge or post-metal was entirely up for grabs, but what wasn't up for debate was King Woman's status as one of heavy metal's most vital and distinctive entities.

King Woman: delivering plenty of WTF?! performances

29 CYNIC
Ascension Codes

SEASON OF MIST

After the deaths of bassist Sean Malone and co-founder Sean Reinert in 2020, Cynic's future looked bleak at best. That Paul Masvidal's progressives returned at all was a miracle unto itself, and the bliss of their fourth album only accentuated that victory. *Ascension Codes* was a celestial masterpiece, defined by digitised vocoders and silky synths. So alien yet beautiful was it that it could have soundtracked an intergalactic utopia. If your eyes were dry by the end, you fared better than us.

28 FULL OF HELL
Garden Of Burning Apparitions

RELAPSE

Not just one of metal's most incendiary bands, Full Of Hell are also one of grindcore's most riveting innovators. Once the debris from the 20-minute barrage of phosphor and napalm had been cleared, forensics were able to reveal the band's fifth album had also unleashed more angular additions. Woodwind and electronics that veered between debilitating squalls and being oddly catchy showed *Garden...* had a bit of class among its caustic fury.

PRESS

EPs OF THE YEAR

They had fewer tracks, but still packed a punch

WORDS: JONATHAN SELZER

BLODET
Vision
CHURCH ROAD
The Swedes unfurled a stunning new vision where embers of doom, post-metal and post-punk smouldered to cast ominous shadows across the mind's eye.

BODOM AFTER MIDNIGHT
Paint The Sky With Blood
NAPALM
Alexi Laiho's swansong found the iconic axeman in imperious form, melding feral energy and sonic grandeur. Unforgettable under any circumstances.

CULT OF LUNA
The Raging River
RED CREEK
Umeå's post-metal powerhouse embarked on a new era with the aid of Mark Lanegan opening up new hinterlands to explore.

EMMA RUTH RUNDLE & THOU
The Helm Of Sorrow
SACRED BONES
This collaboration found fertile ground, with Bryan Funck's shredded retch an inner voice to Rundle's devastated grace.

SPIRIT ADRIFT
Forge Your Future
CENTURY MEDIA
That each of these three tracks could have graced a classic album in any of the past five decades showed how much casual class and timeless, twin-lead potency these Mid-Westerners had at their disposal.

SPORT

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27 BACKXWASH
I Lie Here Buried With My Rings And My Dresses
UGLY HAG

If 2020's *God Has Nothing To Do With This...* album was responsible for introducing the metal world to a new and astonishingly unique voice, then *I Lie Here...* may well have turned Ashanti Mutinta, aka Backxwash, into one of the key signposts for its future. Mining industrial, black metal, horrorcore and traditional African soundscapes, the album was utterly unlike anything metal had ever seen or heard. *I Lie Here...* was an inspirational record, revelling in its freedom from the shackles of genre rules, tropes or conformity.

Backxwash: staying true to herself

PRESS/CHACHI REVAH

BACKXWASH

The rapper revisited one of the darkest periods of her past, and took aim at those who make life difficult for others

WORDS: ROSIE SOLOMON

Winning Canada's Polaris Music Prize in 2020 was only the beginning for horrorcore rapper-producer Backxwash. Following the success of her debut full-length, *God Has Nothing To Do With This Leave Him Out Of It*, was *I Lie Here Buried With My Rings And My Dresses*, a masterful exploration of one of the darkest periods in her life.

Growing up in a religious family in Zambia and hiding her trans identity for years, Backxwash (real name Ashanti Mutinta) has combated rejection, self-doubt and severe depression to get to where she is today – one of the most exciting underground artists around. Back in 2012, after moving to study computer science in British Columbia, Canada, she found herself in the thick of a particularly difficult episode, abusing drink and drugs, and struggling with suicidal thoughts.

"I always thought I'd make an album like *I Lie Here...* at the end of my career, but after *God Has Nothing...*, everything changed," she explains. "I think after that album people expected me to reflect on my successes and how my life has changed, but that's not really me."

As a black trans woman who has moved countries, Backxwash expertly dissects the multi-faceted layers of her marginalisation at the hands of family, society and governments. It's an astonishingly painful portrait of the difficulties she and others have faced in order to live as their authentic selves.

"I didn't set out to make a specifically queer album, but *I Lie Here...* is the most cohesive album I've done," she explains. "It contains my most obviously queer lyrics, the title track talks about oppression from a geopolitical standpoint [*'Exiled from my sisters / The colonies and their vision / Robbing me of my diction'*], *In Thy Holy Name* is more political [*'Billions starving, Bezos hides / Evil minds, whole business thrives'*], and there are references to mental health throughout."

The decision to return to her troubled past was more "about being inspired by art than it is processing trauma". This is where Backxwash's horrorcore sensibilities come in. "*God Has Nothing...* was like *The Blair Witch Project* – full of paranoia and isolation," she explains. "*But I Lie Here...* is more violent, aggressive, and the content that I've written is much more pointed."

She references the track *Wail Of The Banshee* – "It's the most detail I've gone into about suicidal thoughts and drug abuse… I wanted it to be as detailed as possible to put people in the room where it was happening." Suicide ideation is introduced, with Backxwash spitting: *'In the silence, hear the screams of the banshee / Hear the demons that haunt, that puppeteer in my thoughts.'*

"*God Has Nothing...* had a bit of light to it as an album, a bit of redemption," she says. "*But I Lie Here...* is just that – it's lying down and no fighting back. Sometimes, in horror movies, the bad guy wins. But he wins for a reason. It's important to accept that sometimes things don't get better."

Backxwash draws on many genres and influences, but constantly returns to metal. "It's something I'm personally interested in," she says. "I wanted to bring my two worlds together: experimentation and heavy music. And hip hop, obviously, is an incredible genre to act as the platform for innovation. Creating new music inspired by what I am interested in and what I listen to is what I strive to do."

While *God Has Nothing...* used samples from the likes of Black Sabbath and Led Zeppelin, *I Lie Here...* only features one sample, from Godspeed You! Black Emperor's track, *Static*. "When you pick a sample, it should have some significance for you. But when you create a melody from scratch, that's creating a whole world," she explains of the decision to cut back. "It's a representation of what you're feeling at that time in its most pure sense."

Working with fellow trans artists such as Ada Rook of noise-pop duo Black Dresses and Austin-based rapper Censored Dialogue, Backxwash conjures up a feeling of camaraderie between queer, black and horrorcore creators – a remarkable feat for an album written and engineered over lockdown. "Most of the collaborations came from being online and just asking people to contribute to my project," she says. "You have to be cognisant of other people and ask them if they have the capacity to do so, or even the capacity to work on something that is so cathartic."

Despite having a persona that embraces the darkness of everyday life, Backwash remains grateful for her fanbase and the opportunities available to her in 2021 and beyond. "This is crazy to me," she smiles. "Two years ago people wouldn't have listened to the kind of music I'm making. With [2019 EP] *Deviancy*, I was just taking any show that would have me."

She's just been announced for the Netherlands' legendary Roadburn Festival in 2022 – her first performance in Europe. "I wouldn't have had an answer to the question, 'Where do I want to go?' back then," she says. "When *God Has Nothing...* came out and started to gain traction, it just put everything in perspective. It helped me stay true to making music without any reservations, and to do my own art the way I want it."

"THIS ALBUM IS MORE VIOLENT AND AGGRESSIVE"

BACKXWASH

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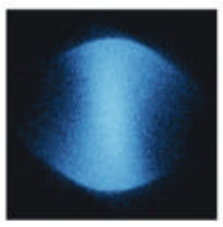
26 SWALLOW THE SUN
Moonflowers
CENTURY MEDIA

Diving into an ocean of Scandic melancholy, Swallow The Sun drew on the sadness of an entire sub-region with *Moonflowers*. Their most grandiose effort yet affixed a much greater focus on symphonic and classical elements while offsetting the heaviness in the band's usual death-doom mix. The funereal mournfulness of aongs like *Keep Your Heart Safe From Me* and *This House Has No Name* perfectly reflected the emotional tsunami crashing all around.

25 AMENRA
De Doorn
RELAPSE

Belgium's blackened post-metal cultists deviated from their procession of 'Masses' to create *De Doorn* – a decision that proved both liberating and cathartic. Amenra's seventh album was intended to be a ritual, freeing their congregation of negativity. As a result, it raged with dense riffs and squealing vocals, but also soothed through lingering post-rock segues. Factor in the all-Flemish lyrics and backing vocals from Oathbreaker's Caro Tanghe, and you have the most unique sermon to ever come from the Church Of Ra.

24 DEAFHEAVEN
Infinite Granite
SARGENT HOUSE



2021 was the year blackgaze scene leaders Deafheaven finally detached themselves from black metal. On their fifth effort, they turned in a fully formed shoegaze record, with creamy guitars, gossamer layers and bright melodies recalling luminaries Slowdive and Ride on majestic cuts *In Blur* and *Villain*. Containing little in the way of metal, save for George Clarke's abrasive shrieks cutting through *Great Mass Of Color*'s dreamy wall of sound, *Infinite Granite* instead represented yet another evolution from San Fran's most divisive yet dynamic innovators.

23 WHILE SHE SLEEPS
Sleeps Society
SLEEPS BROTHERS/SPINEFARM

Where previous record *So What?* took something of a kitchen sink approach to adding new flavours to the While She Sleeps banquet, their fifth album refined the

While She Sleeps bowled the metal world over with *Sleeps Society*

PRESS/GILES SMITH

STREAMS OF THE YEAR

Gigs returned, but we still got great streams!

WORDS: JONATHAN SELZER

AVATAR
Presenting four streams within a month, Sweden's kings of carnivalesque metal swapped scenery, costumes and setlists, powered by a characteristic abandon and lunacy.

MASTODON
Mastodon left it late to do their first livestream, but they did it in mesmerising and immersive fashion, heading to an aquarium to play an acoustic set to a backdrop of aquatic wonders.

NIGHTWISH
With customary grandeur, Finland's symphonic superstars created their own, *Myst*-like virtual world for May's two-night spectacular – a vast, CGI tavern amidst dynamic, ever-changing seasons as *Human. :\|\|: Nature* tracks got the setting they deserved.

PUSCIFER
Maynard James Keenan's enigmatic rockers built their own world around their *Money $hot* album, playing it in full surrounded by lucha libre wrestlers amidst various locations – from wrestling rings to Aztec shrines.

ROADBURN REDUX
A festival that always felt like stepping into another world, Roadburn's livestream incarnation set the bar for others to follow – full of imaginatively conceived live sets and premieres that added up to a unique aesthetic whole.

strategy to produce a genuinely world-class selection of songs. A tribute to the fans that have helped carry Sleeps through a career peppered with setbacks and challenges, Sleeps Society was a breathless amalgamation of everything this band had come to signify in their decade-plus together: razor-sharps riffs, big-ass grooves and arena-worthy choruses, splattered with bursts of electronics and shit-tons of *'WOOOAH!'*s Lyrically, they gave us rallying cries for unity in the face of societal collapse, existential ponderings and, in the case of *Nervous*, a generational anthem exploring mental health.

22 LINGUA IGNOTA
Sinner Get Ready
SARGENT HOUSE

Kristin Hayter doesn't do anything less than full immersion. Stuck in rural Pennsylvania during the pandemic, she opted to internalise both her surroundings and its often bleak history, then reshape it as *Sinner Get Ready*, her third full album as Lingua Ignota. Largely forgoing electronics in favour of traditional Appalachian banjos and dulcimers, what it lacked in volume it made up for with a different kind of heaviness – one that was always dramatic, often disturbing and, as in the case of single *Pennsylvania Furnace*, sometimes staggeringly beautiful.

21 TRIBULATION
Where The Gloom Becomes Sound
CENTURY MEDIA

With a rising profile that had seen the Swedes support the likes of Ghost in recent years, you could have forgiven Tribulation for going more mainstream. They didn't. Yet fifth album *Where The Gloom Becomes Sound* once again took the crepuscular and made it catchy, revelling in goth, the NWOBHM and a cavern-load of high drama. That flamboyant, co-founding guitarist Jonathan Hultén quit Tribulation before its release was a huge disappointment, but as a swansong with them, he couldn't have done better.

20 WARDRUNA
Kvitravn
MUSIC FOR NATIONS

PRESS/KIM ÖHRLING

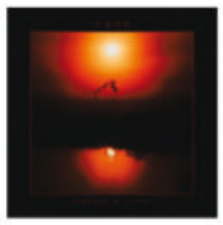
Following the completion of the complex *Runaljod* trilogy – three albums that each explored a set of eight runes from the Elder Futhark, the earliest runic alphabet – Wardruna mastermind Einar Selvik needed a new challenge. Via primal percussion, impassioned harmonies and an array of traditional instruments, *Kvitravn* or 'White Raven' urged us to reconnect with nature and old oral traditions, in order to make sense of the present. It was rich, resonant and a gift in today's fast-moving world.

Wardruna: pure primal brilliance

19 HELLOWEEN
Helloween
NUCLEAR BLAST

Not so much a dream come true as beyond our wildest dreams, the seven-man Helloween rose to the challenge, welcoming back much-loved former lynchpins Michael Kiske and Kai Hansen on a labyrinthine opus full of exciting, nuanced, high-energy anthems to match anything in their storied history. If any devoted pumpkinhead managed to get through the first hour without shedding a tear, Kai's colossal closer, *Skyfall*, finished them off, the emotional pull as profound as the pressure on the neck muscles.

18 URNE
Serpent & Spirit
CANDLELIGHT



Few people were aware of London-based trio Urne at the start of 2021, but they quickly became one of the most talked-about young bands in metal after the release of this, their debut album. A stunning mix of Mastodon, 80s Metallica, Crowbar and Cult Of Luna might sound like too heady an ambition for a band in their infancy, but Urne managed to pull it off, creating a record that stood shoulder to shoulder with their influences.

17 AT THE GATES
The Nightmare Of Being
CENTURY MEDIA

At The Gates had been in fine form since 2014's reunion album, *At War With Reality*, so there was little need to go and rip up their own rulebook for album number seven. And yet, that's exactly what the Swedes did. Delving into the dark corners of pessimist philosophy, they underpinned one of their most conceptually loaded albums with some of their most experimental, leftfield and straight-up batshit songs yet. Epic orchestral segments? Sure. Jazzy instrumental jams? Hell yeah! Tomas Lindberg spending almost a whole song doing spoken-word? Go on then. A woozy saxophone solo? Why the fuck not?! It all combined to form ATG's most fascinating album in years, and almost certainly their finest work since *that* record.

16 WOLVES IN THE THRONE ROOM
Primordial Arcana
RELAPSE

Solitude has suited few bands like Wolves In The Throne Room. While the pandemic sent the rest of the planet into all manner of personal hells, post-black metal's foremost elementalists retreated to their custom-built studio in the forests of the Pacific Northwest to summon an album that seemed to plane-shift between the ethereal and the corporeal. The energy of the earth and the trees flowed through *Spirit Of Lightning* and *Through Eternal Fields*, conjuring an atmosphere as dramatic and disorientating as being lost in a forest at twilight.

Sleep Token: no place to hide

15 CARCASS
Torn Arteries
NUCLEAR BLAST

Circa 1988–93 Carcass were seized by such a febrile state of continual development neither the fans nor the band got to really relish what they'd created before they were onto the next thing. With post-reunion Carcass the opposite is true; eight years after textbook comeback *Surgical Steel*, Carcass settled on their optimum contemporary shape, and open-hearted enjoyment topped the agenda. *Torn Arteries* marshalled all their eccentric melodies and scampering chops with gallows wit and grisly panache.

14 SLEEP TOKEN
This Place Will Become Your Tomb
SPINEFARM

Would Sleep Token be so embraced by the metal masses if they didn't look like they'd walked straight out of a sacrificial ceremony? Who cares when the music's this good? While the savvy, staggered release of the *Sundowning* album allowed for the hype to arguably overshadow the music, for *This Place...* there was no place to hide, and Sleep Token stepped up with a scintillating collection of haunting hymns. Echoey, techy riffs reverberated lusciously around the delicate vocals of mysterious frontman Vessel, while even the lighter stuff, like the floaty synthpop of *Fall For Me*, carried enough weight to fit snugly in our world.

13 ARCHITECTS
For Those That Wish To Exist
EPITAPH

The first Architects album without the formidable work of dearly missed guitarist Tom Searle, *For Those...* nevertheless continued to push the Brightonians' sound forwards while retaining the trademarks that make them one of the UK's most beloved metal bands. It was sprinkled with instant Architects classics, from *Animals*' pulsing, lurching, industrialised riff through the orchestral strings and searing emotional heights of *Dead Butterflies*, to the gentle ebb and heartbreaking poignancy of *Dying Is Absolutely Safe*. For every moment that'd bang a head, there was another that could tear a heart to pieces. Yet again, Architects showed that few can do it better.

12 TURNSTILE
Glow On
ROADRUNNER

For an album that clocked in at just under 35 minutes long, the number of styles and sounds that Turnstile showcased on their third album was phenomenal. From punk to synthwave, nu metal to hardcore, there was something in *Glow On* for everyone and, even more impressively, it was quintessentially Turnstile. There weren't – and still aren't – enough superlatives in the English language to succinctly describe how brilliant this album was or is. All you could do was listen and marvel.

11 RUINS OF BEVERAST
The Thule Grimoires
VÁN

Alexander Von Meilenwald's one-man mission to warp the boundaries of extreme metal continued with Ruins Of Beverast's sixth album. *The Thule Grimoires* wasn't so much a record as a series of intense yet vivid mindscapes painted on a jet-black canvas, with Von Meilenwald pulling everything from goth and 80s industrial to stark militaristic rhythms and monastic chants into his musical universe. The result sounded like everything else and nothing else at the same time.

10 UNTO OTHERS
Strength
ROADRUNNER

Merging gothic grandeur with rumbling, heavy metal thunder and injecting it with earworms to spare, with *Strength*, Unto Others consolidated themselves as one of the most exciting young bands in metal. Upgrading the sound established on 2019 debut *Mana* – released under their previous moniker, Idle Hands – *Strength* sounded bigger, harder, more urgent and more like the music of a band ready for big stages. Where else this year would you hear dreamy, 80s synth wrapped around blastbeats – punctuated by eagle cries, no less – and not sound a step out of place? They even managed to shoehorn in a riotous cover of Pat Benatar classic *Hell Is For Children*. *Strength* was essential listening for blackhearts of every creed.

09 MØL
Diorama
NUCLEAR BLAST

In 2018, Møl stripped the paint from blackgaze's walls to deliver a devilish debut, *Jord*. It gave both elements of the subgenre, black metal and shoegaze, equal airtime. Three years later, the Danish five-piece did it again, squashing both sides of the coin to the point it just became spherical. *Diorama* clocked in at a taut 46 minutes, treating listeners to the furious positivity of early Deafheaven alongside a welcome dollop of Alcest's more atmospheric noodling. Every lead and scream bled with purpose, imbuing their songs with an immediacy their contemporaries hadn't matched; the punk-flecked rumble of *Vestige* was just one case in point. *Diorama* was an exercise in blackgaze bliss, and Møl were only getting started.

08 RIVERS OF NIHIL
The Work
METAL BLADE

While previous album *Where Owls Know My Name* saw Rivers Of Nihil unfurl their wings, *The Work* saw them boldly taking flight into more ambitious planes. Just as Swedish titans Opeth transcended their death metal roots and became fully fledged progressive metal pioneers with *Blackwater Park*, *The Work* delivered similar seismic results for this Pennsylvania collective. The likes of the labyrinthine *Episode* and *Terrestria IV: Work* encompassed both punishing extremity, elegant melodic peaks and thrilling new textures, with lead guitarist Brody Uttley in particular creating gorgeous, engrossing tapestries at every opportunity. An album that revealed new depths and surprises on every subsequent listen, *The Work* seems set to satisfy fans of brave and breathtaking metal until Rivers Of Nihil next break the mould.

PRESS/ANDY FORD

One stunning collaboration

CONVERGE & CHELSEA WOLFE

Following their live shows together, this album team-up saw Converge and friends pushing out of their comfort zones

WORDS: CHRISTINA WENIG

The story of *Bloodmoon: I* begins in 2016: Converge invited Cave In singer Stephen Brodsky, dark singer/songwriter phenomenon Chelsea Wolfe, and her creative partner Ben Chisholm to Roadburn festival in the Netherlands, to play new versions of the hardcore legends' songs together. But the idea behind this project dates back even further.

"We've wanted to expand what we're doing as a band since the 90s," reveals Converge vocalist Jacob Bannon. "Even back then, Kurt [Ballou, guitarist] and myself talked about how we wanted to interject different sounds. We thought it'd be cool to expand the idea of what Converge is, and not be locked into the core four of us making what people would typically perceive as loud, abrasive, heavy music."

When it came to deciding which voices could broaden the band's sonic palette, Chelsea, Ben and long-time friend Stephen were obvious choices – all of them breaking the confines of heavy music in their own ways by incorporating styles as different as neofolk, ambient and progressive rock. Returning home from their shared time in Europe, all parties knew they wanted to take the *Bloodmoon* project further and record an album of original material. "The chemistry was really apparent and we were in family mode right away," Ben remembers.

"THE CHEMISTRY BETWEEN US WAS REALLY APPARENT"

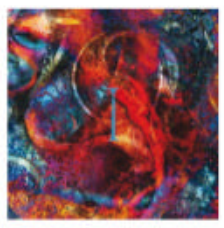
JACOB BANNON

PRESS

07 CONVERGE & CHELSEA WOLFE

Bloodmoon: I

EPITAPH/DEATHWISH INC



Ever since Converge's Blood Moon shows five years ago, during which they reworked their catalogue alongside a host of guest musicians, their fervent fanbase had begged for recorded material. Finally, the fruits of that labour were ready to chomp upon. Just like Cult Of Luna and Julie Christmas's *Mariner* in 2016, *Bloodmoon: I* was best viewed as a completely new beast, rather than a 'Converge & Friends' album. Balancing hardcore savagery, post-metal patience and singer-songwriter balladeering across 11 tracks, the wait was most certainly worthwhile. Jacob Bannon's time in Wear Your Wounds equipped him with the tools to not just survive when duetting with Chelsea Wolfe, but add his own melancholy twist to songs like *Daimon*. A true jewel in Converge's crown.

But with the musicians tied up in their own projects and the pandemic making meetings impossible, writing and recording their collaborative debut remotely, spread across the east and west coast of the USA, took far longer than anticipated – especially since the album was supposed to be a collective effort, with each member being allowed to experiment and contribute material. "We wanted everyone to be able to be and play whatever they wanted," adds Jacob, explaining that often, one person would bring a song idea and others would add to it, until it evolved into a completely different, greater creature.

Bloodmoon: I allowed the participants to set foot in sonic realms they hadn't previously entered. Exploiting the full potential of a band with seven multi-instrumentalists and three singers, they not only wrote parts for themselves, but each other – a new challenge for everyone. "This has allowed me to have a different perspective on songwriting and melody," explains Jacob. "The way Chelsea and Stephen sing is so different than anything I've ever done."

Chelsea agrees. "I entered thinking that I was going to do vocals, but then Kurt said, 'Why don't you take some of these guitar parts?' So I got some guitar parts here and there, which was good for me to challenge myself and step up to the plate," she says.

So far, the band have only confirmed an appearance at France's Hellfest in 2022, but they have an immense desire to continue collaborating, both on and off the stage. "For this record we selected a number of songs that we felt were strong together, but we have a lot more material," Jacob assures us. "It's titled *Bloodmoon: I* for a reason. We all have a ton of things going on, so we're just trying to navigate these complex waters. But we want to do more – this is not a 'one and done' project."

Spiritbox: taking the metal world by storm

SPIRITBOX

The rising Canadians lived up to the hype and delivered one of the best debut albums of the century

WORDS: ELEANOR GOODMAN

In July 2020, Canadians Spiritbox broke the internet by releasing the single *Holy Roller*. Not only did it go hard, it was accompanied by a video of singer Courtney LaPlante decked out like she was in cult horror film *Midsommar*. From here, the hype-o-meter went into overdrive, with anticipation for the band's debut album higher than a maypole at a creepy pagan festival.

Eternal Blue didn't disappoint. With Courtney veering from guttural screams to gorgeous cleans over a soundscape of tech-metal riffs and shimmering electronics, it deftly struck the balance between heavy and ethereal, with hooks that lodged in your head for days. While their US run with Limp Bizkit was cut short due to COVID, and they subsequently had to cancel their UK dates, the album hit the Top 20 in both countries.

"It doesn't make any sense," says guitarist Mike Stringer, who formed the band with wife Courtney after they both left avant-garde metalcore band Iwrestledabearonce in 2015. "At the time it felt like someone was pulling an elaborate prank on us; none of it felt real. Now it just makes us want to tour in the UK and the US badly, and play for those people who supported us more than we already did."

"IT FELT LIKE AN ELABORATE PRANK"

MIKE STRINGER

Lyrically, *Eternal Blue* explored emotional turmoil, as Courtney grappled with feelings of depression and, on the delicate *Constance*, grief and loss. "I think a lot of people can identify with the lyrics and honesty that comes through the music," says Mike. "The overall tone seems to be resonating with people, it's very dark and isolating, and I think it's reflected in people's experiences that they've had over the past couple of years."

Even though Spiritbox have achieved great success in that time, it hasn't really hit home for them yet, as the world's still been dealing with the pandemic and their daily life has largely remained the same. They've been staying in touch with people online, filming some truly jaw-dropping, one-take vocal videos for social media and talking to their Patreons.

"Strangely at this point, not a lot has changed," says Mike. "Geographically, we are very removed from the music industry for now. We live pretty boring lives at home, and we just work on the band. The only thing that has changed is we have more resources and time to spend on making our music now, which we are extremely grateful for."

Mike and Courtney welcomed bassist Bill Crook to the band in 2018, and have now added drummer Zev Rose. They're desperate to take their new, fleshed-out line-up on the road, and finally bring the push-pull dynamics and dark atmospheres of *Eternal Blue* to life on the stage.

"I listen to it, and even though there are a few small things I'd change, I still get the same feeling I had while working on it over the past couple years," smiles Mike. "We love the album, and are extremely excited to play a lot of it live in 2022."

06 MASTODON *Hushed And Grim*

REPRISE

When their dear friend and manager Nick John passed away, Mastodon knew they wanted to pay tribute to him, and their first double album did it in the most painful but beautiful way possible. Shying away from domineering concepts and instead flowing around a loose idea about a departed person's spirit taking up residence in a tree for a year, *Hushed And Grim* showed immense vulnerability, accounting for the big feelings, the small and the indescribable. Opening with the uncertain rush of *Pain With An Anchor*, journeying through the shimmering *Skeleton Of Splendor* and closing with the heart-rending *Gigantium*, it was a technically brilliant yet authentic expression of loss – death or otherwise – and acceptance, and the most fully realised Mastodon album yet.

05 SPIRITBOX *Eternal Blue*

RISE

Encompassing staggering emotional fragility and gut-punching brutality, there were few albums in 2021 that landed with such resounding hype as the debut from these Canadian post-metalcore scene-stealers. From the euphoric anthemia of monster single *Holy Roller* to the Sam Carter-featured groove-soaked juggernaut *Yellowjacket*, Spiritbox relished the opportunity to exercise their creative fluidity on *Eternal Blue*. Swathes of lush melodies and haunting vocals sat alongside feral rhythms and skittering electronica, conjuring up landscapes as vibrant as they were immersive. Eschewing genre limitations from the get-go, it served as a full catharsis for vocalist Courtney LaPlante, the band and the listener. A record that rewarded with each subsequent playback, this irresistible debut not only justified the accompanying fan hysteria: it exceeded it.

04 EMPLOYED TO SERVE *Conquering*

SPINEFARM

In shifting away from their metallic hardcore roots to the more arena-ready hallmarks of groove metal, Employed To Serve again primed themselves as one of Britain's most exciting young bands with *Conquering*. *Exist* hadn't even been

PRESS/LINDSEY BYRNES

Employed To Serve served up their most accessible album yet

EMPLOYED TO SERVE

Woking's finest released an album of straight-up metal bangers. Good job they're supporting the mighty Gojira in arenas next year, then

WORDS: STEPHEN HILL

As soon as we set eyes on Woking's heaviest export, Employed To Serve, around the release of debut album *Greyer Than You Remember* in 2015, we knew they had something special. And, after six years, countless shows and three blinding albums, this year's *Conquering* saw them deliver the most rounded, instant and yet still-crushing album of their career. "We went in definitely trying to make our most commercial record," says vocalist Justine Jones. "I would shy away from the term 'trad metal', as that has some serious undertones, but we wanted to be reminiscent of that classic Roadrunner Records period of the late 90s and early 2000s."

As ETS entered the studio with those sizable goals during the first lockdown, it was, according to Justine, the most unusual recording process of the band's career. "It was a really odd time to try and be in that mindset," she remembers. "It was like creating something in a ghost town or during the apocalypse. We had to drive back and forth to the studio [in Southampton] every day because there weren't any hotels open. It was very strange to be that isolated."

That sense of isolation meant that when the band were finally unleashed for a main stage performance at Download Pilot festival in June, three months prior to *Conquering*'s release, they were beyond fired up to prove themselves. "It was an honour to have played; I'd definitely describe it as that," Justine nods. "We had been going to Download for years and years, and we had a goal in mind of one day being up on the stage where we had seen all of those amazing bands. To do it so early in our career is wild."

"WE CREATED IT IN A GHOST TOWN"
JUSTINE JONES

PRESS/ANDY FORD

The opportunity to debut new song *Exist* was too good to miss. "We really knew that this material had to work in those bigger environments," says Justine. "We love our older stuff, but it is hard to make some of that more complex material connect to huge crowds. We want everyone in, not just our age group, but the young kid at his first festival and his dad in the battle jacket who has been listening to metal his whole life."

If the reaction to *Conquering* is anything to go by, then Employed To Serve might be getting their wish. "It's been weird, because without touring you don't know what your audience looks like yet," Justine smiles. "But we have been getting messages from parents asking if their 13- or 14-year-old is allowed into the show! I think the reaction to the record so far has been great."

It's seemingly only going to get better for the band, as they'll be testing the new material in front of Gojira's crowd in 2022. "It's such a great fit for us," Justine giddily proclaims. "I just want this year to be over so we can be out with them. We've got goals, and playing with Gojira and doing an arena run were both on that list."

Any other goals we should know about?

"Yeah," replies Justine. "We want a *Metal Hammer* Album Of The Year."

They're getting closer all the time. H

released when the band got crowds roaring along to it at Download Pilot, a portent for the immense anthemic quality *Conquering* exhibits throughout. Justine Jones's throat-shredding howl may have maintained the band's links to the grassroots and underground scenes of their past, but the sheer fist-pumping scope of Employed To Serve's latest songs suggests their impending arena appearances are long overdue. Plus, they may have out-Mastodoned Mastodon on *Mark Of The Grave* – no mean feat considering the Atlantans' own vast double album released in 2021.

03 IRON MAIDEN
Senjutsu

PARLOPHONE

Completed in 2019 but delayed by you-know-fucking-what, Iron Maiden's 17th studio album is simply one of their best. It must have been frustrating to sit on an album of *Senjutsu*'s self-evident quality for nearly two years, but all epic things come to those who wait. Bigger and bolder than perhaps ever before, songs like the thunderous, tribal-tinged title track and the windswept and tumultuous *Death Of The Celts* showcased the supreme chemistry the six-piece have revelled in since the dawn of the century. Meanwhile, rootsy single *The Writing On The Wall* and the classic Maiden skull-rattle of *Stratego* highlighted the sharpness of the band's songwriting. Brimming with ideas and still audibly exhilarated by each other's abilities, Maiden didn't sound like veterans nearing the end; on *Senjutsu*, they sounded more vital than ever.

02 TRIVIUM
In The Court Of The Dragon

ROADRUNNER

How do you follow up a career-high record released in the midst of a pandemic? You do it all over again the very next year. *In The Court Of The Dragon* was nothing less than extraordinary, bursting with more killer riffs than most bands manage in a career while packing enough hooks to snare a rampaging kaiju. The title track finally dethroned *In Waves* as the greatest Trivium album opener ever, *Like A Sword Over Damocles*, *No Way Back Just Through* and *Fall Into Your Hands* all tussled for the title of 2021's best chorus, and there wasn't a single duff moment to be found elsewhere. Heavy metal doesn't get any better.

01 GOJIRA

Fortitude

ROADRUNNER

We're living in a world on the brink. Environmental challenges mean every one of us faces an uncertain future and time is running out to fix it. Gojira have been weaving these kinds of warnings throughout their titanic avant-metal since 2005's ecological opus, *From Mars To Sirius*, but no other album in 2021 captured the existential reality of being a resident on Planet Earth quite as starkly as the Frenchmen's seventh effort, *Fortitude*.

'Hope for the world but prepare for the worst', bellowed frontman Joe Duplantier on the bullish *Another World*, which despairs at humankind's propensity to *'mock and slaughter all the purest kinds'*. Elsewhere, over a classic, pick-scraping Gojira riff, *New Found* repeats the refrain, *'We're all on the same boat, we're going down',* juxtaposing brutality and beauty with sleight-of-hand elegance.

Fortitude futhered Gojira's "fears of dying, our fears of living, or breaking the boundaries," as Joe told us in June, describing the existence of the band as a "philosophical quest" – one that's had far-reaching implications. Following the release of the album's crushing first single, *Amazonia*, which burned with white-hot rage at the 2019 Amazon forest fires and featured the lyric, *'The greatest miracle/Is burning to the ground',* the band launched a charity auction that raised over $300,000 for indigenous tribes of the Amazon who've seen their lives and homelands impacted by deforestation, forced labour and violence. Although its messages feel like they're racing against the clock, the album's aim is to inspire and support, not scold – not least because between August 2020 and July 2021 almost 10,500 square kilometres of the Amazon were scorched in devastating fires. Now more than ever, is the time for the world to pull together.

Of course, these kind of themes needed an oceanic-sized vehicle, big enough to carry their weight. Like 2016's *Magma*, *Fortitude* continued the band's drift away from their death metal roots, expanding their audience and arriving at a groove-driven, cerebral and volatile landscape that's fully defined and ripe for the masses. With their labyrinthine complexities and jarring time signatures still present and correct, Gojira's superpower now lies in their ability to balance technicality with sing-along hooks, making their more challenging tendencies instantly digestible while still sounding completely like themselves. Following *Fortitude*'s release, the band announced a 2022 UK tour that will hit arenas – a natural next step for them to take and, when the time comes, straight-for the jugular anthems such as *Born For One Thing* and *Sphinx* will fill every corner of those cavernous spaces.

But *Fortitude* wasn't just about injecting more weight and power. There was more nuance too, in the barely-there campfire ambience of the title track and mystical blues of *The Chant*, which transported the band to a new dominion. Having steadily redefined metal since their emergence over 25 years ago, *Fortitude* felt like an arrival at a long-anticipated destination, pulling from all corners of their discography while pushing their sound resolutely forward. Only Gojira could craft a record that sounded so urgent, felt so terrifying relevant and was yet so exhilarating. Their place in metal's elite echelon is now beyond question.

With *Fortitude*, Gojira delivered a call to arms

GOJIRA

Offering blistering anger alongside hope, healing and a call to action, *Fortitude* was the album we needed in 2021

WORDS: DAVE EVERLEY

There were points during the shows Gojira played in 2021 when Joe Duplantier realised everything was going to be alright. It usually came during *The Chant*, the stately modern metal hymnal that appears on the French band's seventh album, *Fortitude*. That song was designed as a coming together, a kind of communion whose wordless chorus acted as a blank canvas for other people's personal turmoil.

"I ask people to put their own meaning to it," says Joe. "To think about loved ones or someone they've lost or if they are aching inside. To do a chant for their own hearts, for their neighbours, for their friends and families. This pandemic has done something for the world. We all experienced something in common for probably the first time in human history. The fact that we were all at war against this virus brought us together in a subconscious way. I can feel that every night."

Fortitude couldn't have been more aptly titled given the despair, disruption and unprecedented chaos of the last 18 months. But rather than capitulate to events, it acted as a beacon; it was angry without being cynical, emotional but not bleak, urgent and desperate but never without hope. It truly was the album metal needed in 2021.

"We worked hard on this album," says Joe. "We poured our heart and soul into every single song, to a point where we almost didn't care what people were going to think. We were kind of immune to criticism because we were so happy with what we did. We were fulfilled."

That's just as well, because *Fortitude* faced the inevitable resistance from fans who worked themselves up into various states of disgruntlement at the fact it presented a more accessible, more streamlined version of Gojira than even the one on their previous album, 2016's *Magma*. "I know some metalheads were disappointed because we've mellowed out and some of the songs are a little more catchy," says Joe. He offers the perfect Gallic shrug. "We've reached an age where we care less about what other people think. And that feels good."

Fortitude may have dialled up the accessibility but not at the expense of Gojira's activist edge. The single *Amazonia* was inspired by a news report about Brazilian farmers and loggers setting fire to vast tracts of the Amazon rainforest in a catastrophic land-grab – an example of the environmental damage Gojira have long railed against. "We shouldn't be scared to express our opinions," says Joe. "It's time for everybody to step up and be bold. There are a lot of things at stake in the world."

GABRIELLE DUPLANTIER

Gojira put their money where their mouth is by launching a charity drive on the back of *Amazonia* to raise money for the indigenous-owned NGO APIB, which is helping indigenous communities under attack from Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro's right-wing government. "There's a lot of hate and racism and lobbying happening around them," says Joe, his voice tinged with disgust. "They are getting harassed and killed and their villages burned to the ground."

In August, after travel restrictions lifted, Joe flew to Mato Grosso do Sul in Brazil to meet the people the charity was helping and inaugurate some of the houses the money raised had helped build. "Me and my friends were welcomed with open arms," he says.

While he was there, he was 'baptised' by an indigenous shaman. "It wasn't like a Christian baptism," he says. "It was a ritual that was maybe two hours long. They took me in and put a bunch of necklaces around me, there was a lot of prayers and they were dancing. It was incredible. I was moved to tears."

He experienced the dark side of Brazil when he flew to the country's capital, Brasília, to take part in protests against a government bill designed to take away land from indigenous people. Joe joined the 6,000-strong crowd of mostly native Brazilians as armed police and soldiers in armoured cars looked on. "People were worried that I might be arrested, or maybe something worse would happen," he says.

In the end, it all went off without incident. Whether that protest and others like it had any impact or not remains to be seen. "Two of the houses the charity helped build have already been burnt down by monoculture farmers, fuelled by the hate of Bolsonaro and the Brazilian government," says Joe.

But 2021 hasn't just been about environmental catastrophe and unrelenting grimness. Joe revisited the first season of Larry David's classic cranky-old-dude-versus-the-world comedy *Curb Your Enthusiasm*. "I look at it with new eyes," he says with a laugh. "Maybe I'm getting old." Unexpectedly, he also fell in love with *The Battle At Garden's Gate*, the latest album from fresh-faced Led Zeppelin fetishists Greta Van Fleet. "It's like they sounded a lot like Zeppelin, but then they went to bed and woke up and sounded like something else entirely," he says.

"I WAS BAPTISED BY A SHAMAN"

JOE DUPLANTIER

Then there was the matter of starting the ball rolling on the next Gojira album. The five-year gap between *Magma* and *Fortitude* was exacerbated by the pandemic, though Joe acknowledges that Gojira have never been the fastest workers. "We write songs when we feel we have something to say. Plus album sales don't support you, so bands have to tour a lot if they want to survive, and a lot of touring means less energy for new songs."

Still, they haven't been completely idle. "We do have a few songs under our belt," he says, after some pushing. "It shouldn't be as long before the next album, especially if the virus goes away for good and it'll be easier to plan things."

And what will the next Gojira record sound like? "Sometimes we think we should write a super-brutal death metal album, super-intense, super-dark. We still have it in us. But we also have that side of us that is brighter, where we want catchy choruses that people can sing along to. So we'll see."

When that record will arrive remains to be seen, along with the question of exactly what the world will look like when it finally does. We're a long way from being out of the woods as a species or a planet, but the defiance that pulses through *Fortitude* offers nothing if not a sense of hope. "You have to have hope," says Joe. "That's all we have."

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Babymetal are still putting a unique spin on heavy music

BABYMETAL

10 Babymetal Budokan

COOKING VINYL

The Fox God's disciples mark a decade of delirium

IT'S TANTALISING TO imagine a bookies in 1970, and the odds you'd get for putting money on a band called Black Sabbath spawning an ever-evolving genre that would last for more than 50 years. Imagine, then, the spectacular winnings you could have pocketed for betting that the same genre's fifth decade would be dominated by a trio of Japanese teen pop stars.

Contentious it may be, but it's hard to think of a more omnipresent act that's appeared since the wild, polarising phenomenon of Babymetal was first conceived. Even if you're on the side of the divide that bemoans them as an affront responsible for all of metal's ills, their ubiquitous presence is undeniable. However, if you have succumbed to the three albums, live aesthetic and overall machinations of the Fox God, you can join in the celebration of Su-metal, Moametal and the Kami Band's achievements with *10 Babymetal Budokan*. Recorded during the last of a series of 10 anniversary shows at the live album mecca in Tokyo, a COVID-mandated half-capacity crowd adds its enthusiastic voices to the festivities behind the masks that have been handed out. Without the visual aid of the screens, choreography, pyrotechnics and 360° stage, it all comes down to the audio element. And here, the backing Kami Band are on particularly precise form, delivering some of the finest pop metal anthems you could wish for in any decade.

Ultimately, the secret to Babymetal avoiding the fate of other bands bestowed with the 'gimmick' tag has been the consistent delivery of songs that are not just insanely catchy but often vastly superior to those of their more tolerated peers. Take *Karate* for instance: in this setting that

"THIS IS MANNA FROM FOX GOD HEAVEN"

TAICHI NISHIMAKI/PRESS

outrageously potent opening riff and instantaneous chorus are simply irrepressible. The muscular riffs that collide into the sickeningly sweet choruses of *Doki Doki ☆ Morning* and *GJ!* sound even more absurd live, and are all the better for it. The rave-inducing credentials of *Megitsune* are attained before its kaiju-sized breakdown delivers the set's most satisfying low blow, while the strings and over-earnest leads of ballad *No Rain, No Rainbow* present the obligatory fromage.

The long intros and gaps between songs are a chore without being able to see what they accompany, and the sound isn't quite as honed as other albums recorded at the venue. What's more, with only two songs from latest effort *Metal Galaxy – Distortion* and the gloriously overblown *Pa Pa Ya!!* – there's already a nagging feeling that the band may rely too heavily on earlier hits, despite the quality of subsequent releases. But while *10 Babymetal Budokan* may not go down in the annals of immortal live documents where you can taste the magic in the air, it is yet more irrefutable evidence of how capable this uniquely odd but charming collective are in the studio and onstage. If you still think they're the harbingers of the metal apocalypse then it certainly won't win you over, but there are enough devotees for whom this will be manna from Fox God heaven.

FOR FANS OF: Dragonforce, Alien Weaponry, Nightwish

ADAM REES

AEPHANEMER
A Dream Of Wilderness
NAPALM

Gallic melodic death metallers try to create a storm in a tin cup

A blizzard of notes, folky melodies, dynamic tempos and a wallop of symphonic pomp all come together for a thrilling introduction to this Toulouse quartet's third album. Opener proper *Antigone* is a high bar that, sadly, the rest of *A Dream Of Wilderness* fails to reach again, despite the efforts of *Panta Rhei*'s fretboard gymnastics and *Le Radeau De La Méduse*'s operatic singing. Though passionately and exquisitely performed, a very tinny production job does little to help Aephanemer's lofty ideas from getting off the ground, with the orchestral backing proving more of a distraction than sumptuous extra. Luckily, there's enough talent and tenacity on show for its follow-up to get the opulent backing they deserve.

FOR FANS OF: Children Of Bodom, Wintersun, Eternal Tears Of Sorrow

ADAM REES

ALL HAIL THE YETI
Within The Hollow Earth
MINUSHEAD

Hook-laden, Southern-simmered metal from the Hollywood Hills

After spending two years locked up in a vault, All Hail The Yeti's latest release finally sees the light of day, and it's monstrous. Building on the success of 2018's *Highway Crosses*, the Hollywood-based metal magpies draw on sludge, metalcore, stoner and grunge to create a seriously catchy collection of songs that will sound huge in a sweat-drenched venue. Leather-lunged frontman Connor Garrity – sounding like the bastard son of Phil Anselmo, Pepper Keenan and the late Layne Staley – puts his impressive pipes to good use on the hook-laden likes of *Headless Valley* and *Funeral Heart*, both certain to be set staples for years to come.

FOR FANS OF: Crowbar, Down, Corrosion Of Conformity

EDWIN MCFEE

ANOMALIE
Tranceformation
AOP

Austria's ritualistic black metallers invoke the gods of melody

This fourth album from the brainchild of Harakiri For The Sky live guitarist/multi-instrumentalist/songwriter Marrok and drummer Lukas Schlintl is unafraid of mixing epically accessible hooks with lustrous brutality. Starting life with a post-black bent, Marrok's writing has evolved into ritualism, and *Tranceformation* is an evocative title for their most definitive step in that direction yet. The grandiose *Trance V: Cerulean Sun* ends in emotive poignancy, featuring the guest vocals from Rotting Christ's Sakis Tollis over a bombastically engaging undercurrent, while *Trance III: Alive*'s repeated mantra over a slow-burn melody reveals a writer bold enough to eschew extremity for melodious hooks when the narrative calls for it.

FOR FANS OF: Behemoth, Wardruna, Numenorean

TOM O'BOYLE

Sahil 'The Demonstealer' Makhija: lord of the Indian Underground

DEMONSTEALER

The Holocene Termination

DEMONSTEALER

India's king of metal sharpens up and slays

WHEN IT COMES to contemporary metal heroes, few people deserve our salutations more than Sahil 'The Demonstealer' Makhija. Almost single-handedly turning the Indian metal scene from an underground whisper to a global roar, Sahil has been making smart, and sophisticated metal records for 20 years, primarily with his symphonic black metal band Demonic Resurrection but also with the more streamlined Demonstealer. This particular manifestation of the Mumbai multi-instrumentalist's creativity favours a more brutal and barbaric sound, incorporating a shit-ton of technical death and melodic BM, but underpinned by ruthlessly direct thrash grooves. Over the course of three excellent studio albums, Demonstealer has provided Sahil with an outlet for his less ornate ideas, and yet *The Holocene Termination* is easily the most evolved record to bear the project's name. Aided by members of Fleshgod Apocalypse, The Amenta, Six Feet Under and more, this is Sahil's nasty vision upgraded.

The opening title track's stately intro swiftly explodes into a raging blastfest, Sahil's commanding roar scorching across a furious maze of tech-death riffing. The mellifluous lead break that spirals up from the melee is a glorious surprise, and the first evidence that its creator is upping his game. The song's brilliantly pompous coda is another neat touch, and a sly nod to Hellenic black metal too. *An Epoch Of Degradation* is another suffocating storm of precise violence, but with groove underpinning the rolling waves of blastbeats; *From Extinction Begins Evolution* welds a grim squall of blackened tropes to another runaway tech-death train, but with old-school detours and another astonishing guitar solo. Best of the lot, the closing *What She Creates, She Will Destroy* is both a straightforwardly ripping death metal song *and* a deeply catchy gothic rock banger with Fleshgod Apocalypse's Veronica Bordacchni as charismatic vocal foil. This absolutely slays, just as fans of the great man have come to expect.

FOR FANS OF: **Demonic Resurrection, Aeon, Hate Eternal**

DOM LAWSON

AQUILUS

Bellum I

BLOOD MUSIC

Classically minded black/folk crew re-emerge from the wastes

Although it's been 10 years since Aquilus's debut album, *Griseus*, the Australian atmospheric metal/classical hybrid are clearly revving back into action. *Bellum I* is the first of a two-part project, and is a sonically rich epic that justifies the wait. The evocative classical arrangements soar and swoop around the blackened maelstrom, while pianos, violins, mandolins and fipple flutes add colour and texture. It's all pulled off with grandiose class. *Bellum I* is clearly meant to be heard in one sitting, but the 13-minute *Eternal Unrest* is an early highlight that showcases the remarkable range of this album.

FOR FANS OF: **Wolves in The Throne Room, Opeth, Thomas Newman**

REMFRY DEDMAN

ARCHGOAT

Worship The Eternal Darkness

DEBEMUR MORTI

Boss-level death/black blasphemy from the frozen North

Three decades after the release of their first demo, Archgoat remain gloriously unsullied by progress. As with 2018's *The Luciferian Crown*, the Finns' fifth album sounds a little bigger and beefier than the raw, chaotic early recordings, but the vulgar, untamed essence abides. A vicious slamming down of the bloody gauntlet, opener *Heavens Ablaze* is one of the ugliest atonal tirades Archgoat have ever produced, and that subtle cranking up of their trademark sound prevails throughout. *Black Womb Gnosis* is a harrowing downward spiral of discord and violence; *All Christianity Ends* favours soul-sucking, frostbitten doom-death. From *Rats Pray God*'s mutant speed metal to the pitiless dirge of *Burial Of Creation*, Satan's house band are on blistering form.

FOR FANS OF: **Diocletian, Goatpenis, Revenge**

DOM LAWSON

BLACK COAST

Outworld

PARADISE RECORDINGS

Staffordshire heavies keep the nu metal revival going

Grunge-tinged nu metal revivalists Black Coast have produced three EPs since forming 2017, but the Stoke-On-Trent band's debut full-length makes a statement in its own right. *Outworld* favours strong melodies and groove with its riffs and its crisp recording allows the band's clean parts to cut smartly through the heavier sections. The mesh of styles makes the album a touch disjointed but *Void*, *Ache* and *Burn* showcase the potential lurking within. Often urgent-sounding, with occasional Stray From The Path influences, these songs are severely catchy. If they can dial down the drearier vocal sections in favour of the rampant energy, they'll bring a lot of joy to fans still craving this era of metal.

FOR FANS OF: **Korn, Cane Hill, Deftones**

NIK YOUNG

PRESS

THE BROWNING
End Of Existence
SPINEFARM

Dystopian electro-deathcore from Kansas City's chief riffmonger

Conceived and executed solely by Jonny McBee, The Browning's fifth album traverses a conceptual dystopian landscape enhanced for maximum synapse-altering effect. The opening *Doom Eternal*-meets-deathcore title track lurches menacingly amongst a slew of devastating breakdowns, fevered howls and skittering electronica. *Anticendency*'s disquieting ambience, the quasi-industrial thump of *Gott Ist Tot* and *Death Warp*'s groove-drenched clamour all go further than simply sticking a few riffs and blastbeats together. At times McBee's lyrics beg for a sharper edge – not least *Fearless*'s distorted cry of *'The time has come to be one with the sun!'* – but he's crafted an absorbingly dense journey that punches you repeatedly in the gut.

FOR FANS OF: **Chelsea Grin, Emmure, Betraying The Martyrs**

SOPHIE MAUGHAN

DARK SKY BURIAL
Omnis Cum In Tenebris Praesertim Vita Laboret
EXTRINSIC RECORDINGS

Napalm Death bassist heads into the depths of dark ambient

Anyone familiar with Shane Embury knows there's more to him than pulverising skulls with Napalm Death. Alongside his many grind and extreme metal side-hustles he's kept a foot in more experimental waters with Blood From The Soul and Meathook Seed. Dark Sky Burial sees him plunge ever deeper into the murk, using electronica and dark ambient to making sense of these shitty times. *Omnis...* caps an ambitious four-album cycle, and it's a tense, jittery, jarring release packed with muffled dialogue, scrabbling beats and synths that seem pleasantly cushiony until you realise how hard they're being pressed onto your face. Moody and malevolent, though occasionally dappled with light, it's an immersive release. Fans of Justin Broadrick's less metallic endeavours and Disasterpeace's *It Follows* soundtrack should feel comfortably discomfited.

FOR FANS OF: **Techno Animal, Genghis Tron, Autechre**

ALEX DELLER

FUNERAL
Praesentialis In Aeternum
SEASON OF MIST

Expansive misery from Norway's doom metal enigmas

If this is the age of the short attention span, nobody told Funeral. Nearly 90 minutes long and more adventurous than any previous works, *Praesentialis In Aeternum* barely acknowledges the modern world. Instead it conjures impossible grandeur from the depths of mankind's sorrow. Pitched between glacial funeral doom and slow-motion heaviness of a more palpably progressive hue, icy opener *Ånd*, and towering epics *Erindring II – Fall* and *Dvelen* boast numerous elegant twists and turns, each one conspiring to set this further apart from standard notions of grandiloquent woe. Frequently drifting into avant-garde territory, with the corrosive parp of infernal brass an intermittent presence, the Norwegians' holistic approach has forged one of the most immersive and fascinating doom records in recent memory.

FOR FANS OF: **Skepticism, Swallow The Sun, Hamferð**

DOM LAWSON

GENOCIDE PACT
Genocide Pact
RELAPSE

Washington DC death metal quartet tighten their screws

Genocide Pact's second album, *Order Of Torment*, was a solid if unspectacular slab of crushing, groove-laden death, but they've really upped their game here. Their sound hasn't undergone any drastic changes, but it feels tighter, heavier and more detailed. From the wonky Autopsy-style guitar harmonies of *Perverse Dominion* to the doomy lurch of *Mutilated Vision* and pulverising, Bolt Thrower-esque churn of *Purged Flesh*, the band sound reinvigorated and keenly focused throughout. The furious pace of *Deprive/Degrade* and buoyant grooves of *Fossilized Future* (a dead-ringer for *World Demise*-era Obituary) hint at GP's hardcore past whilst remaining firmly in death metal territory. Meanwhile, six-minute closer *Industrial Obedience* is an immensely satisfying cavalcade of surprisingly atmospheric riffs that makes a fitting end for their most robust record so far.

FOR FANS OF: **Gatecreeper, Mammoth Grinder, Bolt Thrower**

KEZ WHELAN

Doodswens offer claws for thought

DOODSWENS
Lichtvrees
SVART

Dutch black metal debutants bring a sense of wonder with their rites

ROUGHLY TRANSLATED AS 'fear of light', *Lichtvrees* is a perfect title for this crepuscular debut album. Despite having only a split and a four-track demo to their name, Doodswens' distinctive sound is remarkably well-realised here, largely thanks to frontwoman Fraukje van Burg's emotive riffing style. It's reminiscent of both the intoxicated luxury of Urfaust and the windswept grandeur of Wolves In The Throne Room, but with a unique spark and evocative darkness to it that is all her own.

The pair sound equally comfortable during long, hypnotic dirges like the nine-minute *Eindzicht* as they do on blistering two-minute ragers like the jittery *IJsheiligen* – a song that combines some of the record's iciest riffs with juddering but extremely effective double-kick patterns. The despondent *Zwarte Staar*, meanwhile, blurs the line between DSBM and doom as Fraukje weaves together droning, dissonant chords with her dry, disembodied shriek buried beneath waves of harrowing, jet-black misery.

Unlike many of their peers, Doodswens have opted for a booming, crystal-clear production here, really allowing drummer Inge van der Zon's interesting beats to shine through with an absolutely thunderous kick drum sound. Whilst never overtly flashy, her minimal drumming is nonetheless far more composed and considered than many primitive black metal acts – just check out the nuanced, expressive fills she squeezes into blast-tastic opener *In Mijn Bloed*.

There's also a profound sadness and vulnerability underpinning *Lichtvrees* – a genuine sense of existential despair in songs like the tortured *Het Zwartewaterland*, making it far more unsettling than the more cartoonish evil many modern black metal acts peddle. It's not perfect – the sample-based interlude, *Onplaatsbaren*, breaks up the album's flow a little too much, for example – but it's an extremely promising debut. If Doodswens can continue to hone in on the dark, chilling atmosphere they've drilled into it here, they'll be onto something truly special.

FOR FANS OF: **Urfaust, Xasthur, Velvet Cacoon**

KEZ WHELAN

DOLPH CANTRIJN/PRESS

Epica add some steam to their livestream

EPICA

Omega Alive

NUCLEAR BLAST

Dutch symphonic metal icons unveil their grand designs

EPICA APPROACH THEIR 20th anniversary with the confidence and grace of a band who know they've never compromised in pursuit of grandiose creative ambitions. Spread across over 90 minutes of sprawling, epic metal compositions as performed in a Belgium-based livestream earlier this year, *Omega Alive* sees the Dutch band exercise the fullness of their sound as they show just how they became one of symphonic metal's most recognisable names.

As opposed to the more directly operatic stylings of Nightwish or gothic inclinations of Within Temptation, Epica's strength has always been in how seamlessly the band blend imperious prog-tinged death metal with their classical components, fitting in as comfortably with the likes of Opeth or Oceans Of Slumber as they do After Forever or Delain. *Omega Alive* exemplifies this from the off, opening number *Abyss Of Time* going for broke with a sweeping metal composition that soars on the interplay between Simone Simons' theatrical melodies and Mark Jansen's apocalyptic growl.

Given its title and the fact the band haven't been able to tour *Omega* due to COVID, its unsurprising that *...Alive* leans heavily on the band's most recent release. But this only further illustrates just how much *Omega* elevates the anthemic qualities of Epica's craft, the new cuts standing as some of the most addictive and instantly stirring songs. Even so, older songs like *Unchain Utopia* or *Cry For The Moon* (described by Simons as "the alpha that took us on a fantastic 20-year journey") show that such bombast and flair isn't anomalous in the band's canon. Transported into the live environment, there is a sense of physical space between the band's choir and Simons' own vocal that adds incredible atmosphere, honing their intrinsic dynamics to an aptly epic scale.

FOR FANS OF: Within Temptation, Opeth, Oceans Of Slumber

RICH HOBSON

GODLESS

States Of Chaos

SELF-RELEASED

Furious brutality from India's thriving underground

Godless have swiftly established themselves as one of India's most potent metal entities. Following on from two widely acclaimed EPs, *States Of Chaos* is the Hyderabad quartet's first chance to fully demonstrate their prowess. Graced with a raw but punchy sound that eschews modern death metal's identikit instincts, Godless take off like hellbound rockets on the breakneck *Malevolent* and groove-driven bruiser *Visions*, stubbornly refusing to dial down the intensity thereafter. Emboldened by the pit-starting power of thrash, the sinewy *Netherworld* and the unhinged *Fluxion* have as many catchy moments as they do bursts of feral insanity, while the stripped-down fist-flurry of *Post-Cryogenic* stabs and slashes with Ringworm-style crossover gnarliness.

FOR FANS OF: Monstrosity, Blood Red Throne, Kataklysm

DOM LAWSON

HELMET

Live And Rare

EARMUSIC

NYC's precision-drilled noise rockers straddle two exacting eras

Since 1989, Helmet's live shows have been about zero-fluff renditions of their discography. Night after night, noise rock's most exacting band deliver bull's-eye renderings of their material, and the two shows highlighted here do just that. It doesn't matter that side one is one of the band's first ever performances, a year before their *Strap It On* debut, or that side two is from Australia's Big Day Out festival at the apex of their early 90s success. Both are unflinchingly Helmet with John Stanier's metronomic drumming, crushing guitar/bass tones and not an iota of banter or non-musical personality coming from the stage.

FOR FANS OF: Prong, Cop Shoot Cop, Swans

CONNIE GORDON

KING BUFFALO

Acheron

STICKMAN

Rochester psych rockers seek out a host of cave pleasures

Wimps and posers, leave the hall: King Buffalo recorded their fourth album inside an actual cave. That's obviously *Acheron*'s most striking detail, but it doesn't mean this US trio have nothing else to offer besides Bear Grylls crossover potential. Amidst their usual psychedelic fare, truffles of greatness can be uncovered if you stick your nose in deep enough. *Cerberus*'s build from delicate notes to flagrant soloing is masterfully crafted, as are *Shadows*' bluesy shuffles and twinges against some gloriously Jeff Wayne-style synth. There are equal amounts of restraint and raucous noodling too, and while it never quite crunches like Green Lung or Spaceslug, there's enough to entertain the discerning stoner guzzler.

FOR FANS OF: Green Lung, Spaceslug, Spelljammer

ALEC CHILLINGWORTH

PRESS

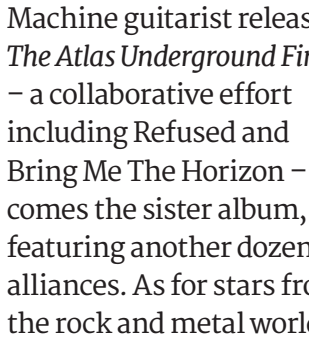
TOM MORELLO
The Atlas Underground Flood
MOM + POP

RATM six-stringer extends his eclectic adventures

Tom Morello has been a busy bee. Just two months after the Rage Against The Machine guitarist released *The Atlas Underground Fire* – a collaborative effort including Refused and Bring Me The Horizon – comes the sister album, featuring another dozen alliances. As for stars from the rock and metal world, the likes of Kirk Hammett and Rush's Alex Lifeson on *I Have Seen The Way* will intrigue, while *The Bachelor*, featuring Idles, is a rumbling cacophony of distortion and anger. It's a fascinating listen, and you can't deny Tom's desire to come up with unorthodox combinations. However, much like its predecessor, it feels like a lot of genres were thrown at a wall and only half of them stuck.

FOR FANS OF: Muse, Audioslave, Royal Blood

ELLIOT LEAVER



NEKROMANT
Temple Of Haal
DESPOTZ

Swedish hard rock/doom crew finally get out of their jim jams

Debuting as Serpent in 2012 before taking the less well-used moniker Nekromant in 2016, *Temple Of Haal* is technically the fifth album in eight years from this Swedish trio, and it marks the point where they audibly start taking things more seriously. Previous records had no shortage of warmth and enthusiasm, but felt more like Sunday hobby jams than the work of truly noteworthy original artists. Across these 46 minutes the guitars are harder and sharper, the musical ideas darker and more distinct, the production more organic and expansive – just a hike in quality at every level. Mattias Ottosson's voice has touches of a depressive Ozzy, and the Sabs remain a key influence, but there are no retro trappings or slavish cribbing. Nekromant's honest simplicity, pacey grooves and bonded power-trio chemistry has found a neat balance between the old and the new.

FOR FANS OF: Grand Magus, Black Sabbath, The Sword

CHRIS CHANTLER

THE OCEAN
Phanerozoic Live
PELAGIC

Post-metal conceptualists capture a twin stream for the ages

Hampered by the pandemic, Germany's post-metal collective, The Ocean, proved more resourceful than most. *Phanerozoic Live* incorporates audio and visual of the twin streams they performed of 2018's *Phanerozoic I* and 2020's *Phanerozoic II*. The *Phanerozoic I* session was recorded live in Bremen's Pier 2 concert hall, with the band give it their gut-bursting all, performing as if their audience were right in front of them. The *II* session was recorded more intimately, the band forming an inward-facing circle, and was incorporated into the Roadburn Redux online festival. It serves the more reflective nature of the record well. With crystal clarity, both intimately, emotively explosive performances sound huge. Given the tumult we're living through, The Ocean's dramatisation of the passing of aeons serves as a poignant reminder of our tenuous grip on this dust mote we call home.

FOR FANS OF: Cult Of Luna, Year Of No Light, Intronaut

TOM O'BOYLE

OTARGOS
Fleshborer Soulflayer
XENOKORP

Gallic black/death metallers return in fully tooled up glory

Following hot on the heels of last May's live album, *20 Years Of Human Termination*, Otargos's cranium-cracking seventh full-length continues their comeback in style. *Fleshborer Soulflayer* sees the return of riff-wrangler Astaroth after a decade-long absence, and also marks the debut of new drummer Michaël Martin. The French veterans haven't sounded as fired up and ferocious in an age; Martin especially impresses on the bloodthirsty *Blessed By Pestilence*, and he helps take the band's brand of cosmic blackened death metal to another level. Highlights include the lightning-fast *Xenos*, which features a chilling and thrilling sci-fi-inspired mid-section, and *Incursion Of Chaos*, which boasts a vicious guitar solo that could soundtrack a rampaging Xenomorph ripping into a crew of unfortunate astronauts.

FOR FANS OF: Behemoth, Dark Funeral, Deathspell Omega

EDWIN MCFEE

SMALL MERCIES

Where EP is short for 'Epic Potential'

BLIND SUMMIT
Hell And Heresy
SELF-RELEASED

Manchester quartet Blind Summit's amalgam of djent rhythms and electronic elements might not be quite as fresh as their press release suggests, but they prove themselves adept at the style. Fans of Spiritbox and Jinjer take note.

REMFRY DEDMAN

COILGUNS
Shunners/Burrows
HUMMUS

Employing a bassist for the first time, these two tracks from Coilguns' upcoming album preview gloriously throbbing and melodically innovative noise rock, oozing angularity and hooks like a geometry textbook stored in a baitbox.

CONNIE GORDON

CORRODED SPIRAL
Ancient Nocturnal Summoning
PHANTOM LIMB

Four tracks of skull-caving noise, mutant electronics and tar-thick, lysergic menace. This debut isn't for the fragile of mind. Iggor Cavalera and Integrity's Dwid Hellion are both involved. Serious madness.

DOM LAWSON

DJINN-GHÜL
Mechalith
VICIOUS INSTINCT

This American-Venezuelan deathcore duo are clearly building something. From the glitchy effects and unhinged drumming of *Ore & Fluid*, *Mechalith* manifests a foreboding atmosphere over the course of its four tracks.

ADAM REES

NO BRAGGING RIGHTS
No Bragging Rights
PURE NOISE

The long hiatus has brought this melodic hardcore band back with sharper songwriting than ever. True to their emotive sound, but armed with more defiance, depth and artfully balanced roars and cleans, it's a glorious return.

NIK YOUNG

REPENTANCE
Volume I - Reborn
NOBLE DEMON

This Chicago quintet's latest EP grafts and spits out a celebration of metal through the ages. Swathes of thrash intertwine with galloping NWOBHM riffs and melodic grooves, its five tracks saluting the past with irresistible gusto.

SOPHIE MAUGHAN

Gåte are finally in their elements

GÅTE
Nord
INDIE RECORDINGS

Norway's former pop-rockers fully embrace their pagan folk roots

AMONG 2021'S PARADE of surprises, Gåte released a captivating five-track EP, *Til Nord*, that saw the highly successful Norwegians turn away from their pop-rock origins and fully embrace their native folk music heritage. Reimagining some of their biggest hits as spectral Norse ballads, the ethereal qualities of the music reached a cerebral depth far beyond Gåte's earlier efforts. Most stunning was how seamlessly they translated those early tracks into highly convincing Norse hymns, underpinned by ancient instrumentation and Gunnhild Sundli's layered, powerhouse vocals.

While their first two albums – 2002's *Jygir* and 2004's *Iselilja* – featured prominent folk elements, it would be misleading to view Gåte as a strictly folk band at that time. 2018's *Svevn* pushed their sound further into folk rock territory, synthesising Wardruna's primal pagan ethos with flashes of modern rock and electronica. With *Nord*, Gåte have stripped away all modern-day reference points, unveiling a compelling collection of authentic Norse folk that marks their most ambitious work yet.

Four of the EP's tracks return with full production – *Hemnarsverdet*, *Kjærleik*, *Horpa* and *Rideboll og Gullborg* – along with new versions of *Jomfrua Ingebjørg* and closer *Sjåaren*. All but unrecognisable from the originals, the hypnotic thrall of Gunnhild's stacked choral harmonies, along with the mournful drone of strings, cast each track as its own deeply sacred ritual. *Kjærleik* stands out for its enthralling climax, showcasing the raw emotional potency of the old Norse sound. Although *Nord* reveals a stripped-back approach, this is relative to their first two albums; new tracks like opener *Solfager og Ormekongen* and *Sigurd og Trollbrura* burst through the speakers with chest-pounding vitality, courtesy of the full-bodied production of guitarist/vocalist Magnus Børmark.

While Wardruna's influence echoes loudly throughout the album, Gåte's strident commitment to authenticity and their seductive talent for conjuring such a mesmerising, mystical realm, establish *Nord* as essential listening for any folk and pagan enthusiast.

FOR FANS OF: Wardruna, Kalandra, Heilung

JOE DALY

PSY:CODE
PSVCODE
SELF-RELEASED

Danish industrial djenters continue to hone their craft

Coming just a year after their fourth album, *Persona*, *PSVCODE* shows how far the Copenhagen collective have come. A more seamless blend of their gothic, electronic and Meshuggah influences, these 10 tracks form a cohesive whole. Shimmering synths and chiming notes create a framework for the likes of *Brumation* and *Disengage* to slowly grow into and deliver their emotional clout. When they shift up gears, the riffs of *You Lead Me* and *Disconnect To Reflect* flex their muscles before the mix of understated clean vocals and stiff barks make their presence felt. It's fitting that closer *Under Water* is the best example of these elements combining and delivering a vigorous final crescendo.

FOR FANS OF: Soilwork, Gojira, Tesseract

ADAM REES

PYREXIA
Gravitas Maximus
UNIQUE LEADER

New York death metal veterans offer only foreseeable brutality

After 40 years in the game, Pyrexia haven't lost their potency to deliver heaviness in its purest form. *Gravitas Maximus* leaves you struggling for breath, battering your skull for the densest 25 minutes of bombastic brutality you'll find this side of Hell. All well and good, but it's a bit disappointing that with all this heat there's no real flavour that fans have now come to expect. When the only ingredient is formulaic aggression, the album comes off as two-dimensional with no surprises in store. The record has raw power on its side, but it doesn't go far enough to unshackle itself from being another death metal cliché.

FOR FANS OF: Cannibal Corpse, Goregasm, Suffocation

HYWEL DAVIES

REBREATHER
The Line, Its Width, And The War Drone
AQUALAMB

Eccentrically minded heaviosity from the gravity wells of Ohio

These Ohio noise rockers have toiled in independent and micro-label obscurity for 20-plus years. Thankfully, Aqualamb Records are hellbent on broadening the reach of the trio's 'cave pop'. Album number five exists in the same sonic neighbourhood as Torche's 'thunder pop', channelling the Pacific Northwest's grey sky depression and lumberjack heaviosity. *Sick Sick Sick* stomps like a pair of well-worn workboots coated in engine oil and wood chips, while *Silent H* and *Choke On It* do admirable jobs of introducing harmonic richness to tectonic crawling via guitarist Barley Rantilla's Ozzy-gone-slacker-grunge vocals. Their closing parry of a stoner/space doom take on Porno For Pyros' *Pets* is strangely appropriate in their eccentric hands.

FOR FANS OF: Whores, Cavity, Melvins

CONNIE GORDON

WORLD SERVICE

Heavy metal uprisings from around the globe

INTRICATED
Apocalyptic Metamorphosis
COMATOSE MUSIC

What these Thai slammers lack in invention they make up for with Alan Douches' mastering. *Apocalyptic Metamorphosis* oozes potent venom from every pulverising riff and guttural growl.

ADAM REES

SAVAGE DEITY
Decade Of Savagery
INHUMAN ASSAULT

Planning a chilled-out holiday in Thailand? Savage Deity want a word. This is hammering OSDM with shades of Deicide and early Gorguts – blasphemous in intent and zero interest in your beach-ready bullshit.

DOM LAWSON

WINTERBURN
Ivory Towers
SELF-RELEASED

This Dubai band's debut album is a swashbuckling, hard rock cocktail with an eye on Hollywood's Sunset Strip, riffs for days and earworms for even longer. An extremely fun, boisterous effort.

ELLIOT LEAVER

PRESS X2

REVEAL!
Doppelherz
SEPULCHRAL VOICE

Swedish filthmongers take their own route into the Twilight Zone

As musically different as they are, Reveal! have seemingly jumped down the same rabbithole used by Morbus Chron, Lifelover and In Solitude. These Swedes are drawn from the same DNA – think Morbid Angel, early Mayhem, Tormentor – only to trade the usual generic clichés about the occult and Satan for urban paranoia, fuelled by sleep deprivation and a shitload of distorted post-punk records. The presence of former In Solitude bassist Gottfrid Åhman probably plays a role here, and Reveal! often stumble in a drunken and punkish stupor. But underneath those seemingly shambolic riff structures and weird lyrical metaphors lies a bunch of misfits all too happy to stand on the barricade with a Molotov Cocktail in their hands.

FOR FANS OF: IXXI, Shining, Morbus Chron

OLIVIER BADIN

RHAPSODY OF FIRE
Glory For Salvation
AFM

Italian power metal institution hit a vibrant new high note

The dissolution of the Italian power metal legends' original line-up has given us a veritable stable of Rhapsodies; guitarist Luca Turilli's Rhapsody from 2011, singer Fabio Leone joining him to form Turilli-Leone Rhapsody in 2016, each competing for epic fantasy bombast. Happily, Fabio's departure enabled an exciting rebirth for the renamed parent band, with new singer Giacomo Voli rising to the challenge with his emotive storyteller pipes. *Glory For Salvation* confirms his triumph, hitting every note with clarity and conviction, silky sensitivity and rugged passion. Several songs here rank among the band's finest, with gargantuan choral choruses, lightning guitar runs and billowing baroque symphonics at full pelt. *Maybe I'll Be Your Hero* pushes the cheese too far, and a few fillers pad the runtime, but ROF remain powerful contenders for the crown.

FOR FANS OF: Helloween, Blind Guardian, DragonForce

CHRIS CHANTLER

RINUWAT
Dua Naga
HEAVY MACHINERY

Uplifting séances from the Australia/Southeast Asian interzone

This debut burns and flays like a supernatural purge via extreme chemical peel. At its combustible core Karina Utomo, Rama Parwata and Mike Deslandes mainline Southeast Asian musical traditions. The heavy sense of ritual permeating their pummelling jams is bolstered with brutalised gamelan clattering beneath mushrooming guitar maelstroms and Utomo's bewitching buffet of animistic invocations. On *Arawa* she pitches an abominable amalgam of amphibious croak and mutant leonine purr over haunting, Morricone-like twang, bamboo flute and ceremonial chimes, before the relative calm yields to a distortion-charged, apocalyptic bumrush. The ancient Javanese moniker means 'to liberate oneself from a curse'. It's well-chosen; *Dua Naga* replicates an unravelling shamanic possession, complete with mantras, spasmodic bouts of mystical resistance and what sounds like a pawang birthing the afterlife from his windpipe.

FOR FANS OF: Senyawa, Keiji Haino, Old Man Gloom

SPENCER GRADY

SOLAR CROSS
Echoes Of The Eternal Word
TRANSCENDING

Death'n'roll diversions from ex-Omnium Gatherum members

These Finnish brothers are marketed as a "progressive death metal trio featuring [ex-]members of Omnium Gatherum", but that under-sells their innovation. Death'n'roll is the core of Solar Cross's debut album, with chords frequently swaggering over stomping hard rock rhythms. However, every song radiates with its own, distinct aura. The anthemic *Mother Of Wolves* darts from melodeath to the best chorus Killing Joke never wrote, with frontman Lauri Pikka invoking his best Jaz Colman drawl. *Bloodstreams* interrupts itself with a jagged thrash riff and acoustic guitars jangle beneath the monolithic *Jatuli*. Admittedly, not every risk is rewarded; *Echoes Of The Eternal Word*'s post-rock finale *Golden, Crowned And Pure* meanders well beyond its welcome. *Echoes...* still hints that these veterans could find life anew as a fearlessly eclectic tour de force.

FOR FANS OF: Killing Joke, Dark Tranquillity, Sólstafir

MATT MILLS

Imperial Triumphant take you on another gilt trip

IMPERIAL TRIUMPHANT
An Evening With Imperial Triumphant
CENTURY MEDIA

NYC's avant-extreme constructivists fiddle around their foundations

MUCH LIKE IMPERIAL

Triumphant themselves, this album seems to have been hurled into the world with little by way of excuse or explanation – almost a hands-thrown-up '*You* make sense of it!' As you'd expect from a band so obtuse and wilfully different, this is not an entirely standard live album. There's no between-song chat and no whooping crowd, and even the band's choice of venue, the Lower East Side's fêted Slipper Room, is not a time-honoured metal dive. Instead, it's a hub for boundary-pushing vaudeville and burlesque – a leftfield choice, but one entirely fitting for all this louche, luxurious, champagne-sprayed carnage.

The only predictable aspect, in fact, is how the band lean on their most recent material, pulling three shattered tracks from 2018's *Vile Luxury* and the rest from last year's staggering *Alphaville*. While this is not a rote performance of The Hits, it isn't an exploding-out of ideas and themes either. Cuts like *Rotted Futures*, *Swarming Opulence* and *Alphaville* are immediately recognisable, with their mindfuckery subject to subtle tweaks and retouches. The live recording does, though, reveal different layers of sound, idea and complexity, and there's a directness that ensures the study, art and craft of the jarring abstractions don't play second fiddle to savagery or attack. There's barely any respite, though *Transmission To Mercury* does offer a brief pause for breath. Previous collaborator Ben Hankle pops up here on trumpet, and the intro's noir-ish, nursing-a-scotch-at-3am-in-a-New-York-dive-bar vibes offers the clearest example of how deeply jazz runs through the band's twisted, nightmare metal.

As exciting as this all is, though, the greater thrill lies in where the band might yet take their Art Deco horrorscapes. This, after all, is *done*, and Imperial Triumphant are very much focused on jagged, god-baiting skyscrapers yet to be built. So *An Evening With...* begs the question: what happens next?

FOR FANS OF: Pyrrhon, Evaporated Sores, Voivod

ALEX DELLER

Ye Banished Privateers scuttle all your notions of pirate metal

YE BANISHED PRIVATEERS

A Pirate Stole My Christmas

NAPALM

Sweden's oddball pirate troupe have themselves a rum do

ON PAPER, THE idea of a pirate metal Christmas album sounds like a final 'Fuck you' from a year that was supposed to offer us redemption. But whether you give the likes of Alestorm and Rumahoy a wide berth or what are you, four?, Umeå, Sweden's Ye Banished Privateers are likely going to scramble all your co-ordinates, your expectations, and whatever sense of superiority you thought you had.

There are *loads* of them for a start, the album's personnel count of 20 clearly not four or five mates having a laugh, but a *culture* – one that, like the Viking re-enactment scene attached to Heilung and Wardruna, has actually put the effort in to go further than the prop shop and steep themselves in the history. For all the apparent silliness of the concept, there's an air of commitment. From the genuine, largely Celtic folk traditions infusing their last four albums through the completeness of their aesthetic to the fact they can actually sing, Ye Banished Privateers are more akin to a Romantic painting while their peers are wielding crayons.

What makes them, and *A Pirate Stole My Christmas* in particular, so uniquely odd, however, is the near total lack of forced jollity (*Drawn And Quartered*'s opening *'Long gone merrily up high/In hell our fiddler's swinging'* suggests a not-entirely celebratory approach), and here, a manageable level of schmaltz. As with their previous albums, YBP don't write songs so much as set immersive scenes, where, as with 2017's 360° video for *First Night Back In Port*, the boundary between the sonic peripheries and fore-ground is erased. So while *Ring The Bells* turns *Jingle Bells* into an exhausted yet expectant return to cove, as with *Little Rummer Boy*, and *Deck And Hull*, it sound like it's spontaneously occurring in a rowdy tavern, as drunken mutters populating the outskirts gradually join in. The level of punning lies somewhere between Cannabis Corpse-style guffaws (*'Two salty rats/Three scurvy dogs/Four wooden legs/FIVE YARS OF RUM'*) and well-thought-out reinvention. But then you have the strangely heartfelt *Oh Cannonball* – a rustic lament whose reverence and woe could be a Hexvessel track, making this an album full of unexpected treasures.

FOR FANS OF: The Pogues, Tom Waits, Skullduggery

JONATHAN SELZER

SUNN O)))

Metta, Benevolence BBC6 Live: On The Invitation Of Mary Anne Hobbs

SOUTHERN LORD

US drone overlords reveal their radio-unfriendly side

It says a lot about your band when Anna Von Hausswolff is the cheeriest part of your new record, but that's just Sunn O))). Still, this hour-long, three-track live opus is comparatively upbeat held against its source material: 2019's *Life Metal* and *Pyroclasts*. Recorded in the BBC's legendary MV4 Studio, the US drone collective use Anna to flesh out those lumbering tones and themes explored a few years back. At its core, this remains oppressive, monotonous drone, but Anna's rich vocal timbre and synthwork lend the two *Pyroclasts* tracks genuine warmth. Once she drops out and *Troubled Air* stretches to nearly triple its original length, though, the game's up: we're not supposed to enjoy this.

FOR FANS OF: Neurosis, Boris, Swans

ALEC CHILLINGWORTH

SWAMP COFFIN

Noose Almighty

APF

Rotherham sludge trio indulge in some primal scream therapy

Born out of the frustration that comes with living in a dying town on a dying planet, Swamp Coffin's debut is one seriously pissed-off sludge record. Dense opener *Your Problem* makes this apparent from the off, with Jon Rhodes' bitter, hardcore-indebted yelp gelling perfectly with the song's ominous, despondent chords. But even during the record's most crowd-pleasing moments – the swaggering bluesy licks in *Jägerbombsaway* or the huge propulsive groove in *Barbarian Windsor* – there's still a palpable feeling of desperation. *Noose Almighty* is at its best when it fully embraces the misery, however, as on the cathartic but surprisingly tender title track or the sickeningly murky morass of gloomy *Welcome To Rot*.

FOR FANS OF: Eyehategod, Conan, Iron Monkey

KEZ WHELAN

THERE'S A LIGHT

~~*for what may I hope?*~~ *for what must we hope*

NAPALM

Meticulous, post-rock meanderings from Germany's rarified realms

It's the big label debut for these German post-rockers off the back of a well-received debut, *A Long Lost Silence*, and a sold-out tour of China. They're not getting ahead of themselves, though, for this second release reaffirms their impressive talents at crafting textured, enveloping music. *Within The Tides*, building smoothly without incident, and *Refugium*'s soft, yet tantalising saxophone, are just two of highlights where this quintet show what can be done with an aural space if controlled with the utmost care. Grab a good pair of headphones and enjoy a gorgeous experience.

FOR FANS OF: Explosions In The Sky, Russian Circles, Godspeed You! Black Emperor

ELLIOT LEAVER

THY WORSHIPPER
Bajki O Staruchu
PAGAN

Idiosyncratic Polish extremists take a trip to the dark side of folk metal

Folk metal's jaunty perception gets a knife through the heart as ritual fervour grasps the pagan black metal of Thy Worshipper – a Polish band based in Dublin. *Bajki O Staruchu* ('Fairytales About An Old Man'), their first record in six years, sees two new additions: drummer Marcin Pazera and vocalist Monika Lubas. At its peaks, it draws you inexorably into its world of fantastical clamour, offsetting Marcin Gąsiorowski's reverent rasp with Lubas's rapt homilies over a combination of folk instrumentation and loose, raw extremity. Lubas's storyteller soprano and the gleefully unbound, expressive instrumentation is brutally cut short by Gąsiorowski's terse vocal reproach and dead-serious blasting intensity on the likes of *Aniołkowi Nie Wierz* and closing track *Mgła*'s ethereal wind. An idiosyncratically intense, magical listen for those fond of eccentric curios.

FOR FANS OF: Necrophobic, Unleashed, Asphyx

MATT MILLS

VARIOUS ARTISTS
Killer: 50 Years Later
PALE WIZARD

Alice Cooper's fourth album gets an underground makeover

Killer: 50 Years Later is the first in an ambitious series in which tributes to classic albums by contemporary underground bright lights are released 50 years to the day. Here, Alice Cooper's fourth full-length's most familiar moments are placed in capable hands as Green Lung masterfully replicate *Under My Wheels*' scuzzy, California coast blues and Grand Mal add extra heft to *Be My Lover*'s arena rock thrust. More dynamic cuts like *Dead Babies* and *Desperado* are modernised by Mos Generator and Ritual King, but it's the bonus tracks that garner attention. That's as much for Alunah's powerful version of *I'm Eighteen* and filthy thrashers Possessor sounding less filthy on *Muscle Of Love* as it is for offering non-*Killer* tracks and ostensibly already betraying the young series' mission statement.

FOR FANS OF: Alice Cooper, Green Lung, Mos Generator

CONNIE GORDON

WOLFTOOTH
Blood & Iron
NAPALM

Trad metal revivalists make a compromise with the modern age

The songtitles might suggest some marauding berserker metal experience, but Wolftooth's third LP of cult trad metal has an oddly soothing quality. Perky, quirky guitar melodies, picked out in twin harmony, and nimble solo duels, will get a band a long way, and the guitars are clearly the focus. Drums and bass are pared well back and although Chris Sullivan's nasal surfer-dude-Ozzy voice does a fine job on imploring high-note choruses, he's very much a guitarist singing. The self-description "Feelgood American heavy metal with modernized flair" is an apt one, although the "modernized flair" might just be because it sounds like it was recorded on a computer. Nonetheless, the guitar interplay is a delight, spiralling, embracing, ringing with the joy of existence, then snapping textbook D&D riffs out of thin air.

FOR FANS OF: Cirith Ungol, Grand Magus, Black Sabbath

CHRIS CHANTLER

UNANIMATED
Victory In Blood
CENTURY MEDIA

Melodeath godfathers remember what brought them to the dance

Debuting in February 1993 – months before Carcass's *Heartwork* and Dark Tranquillity's *Skydancer* – Unanimated were the missing link between death metal and melodeath. *In The Forest Of The Dreaming Dead* endowed the Stockholm sound with catchy, black metal-inspired tremolo picking, but repeated hiatuses have hindered its creators' legacy. *Victory In Blood* is their first album in 12 years, but time has not dulled this battering. If anything, *As The Night Takes Us* and *The Devil Rides Out* represent the sharpest songwriting of Unanimated's career, as frontman Mikael Broberg roars infectiously simple refrains over screeching guitars. *The Golden Dawn Of Murder* crescendos by adding blastbeats to a virtuoso lick, while *XIII* and *The Poetry Of The Scared Earth* gorge themselves on death/doom grandeur. As both a proto-melodeath history lesson and hurricane of exciting riffs, this comeback excels.

FOR FANS OF: The Ruins Of Beverast, Blaze Of Perdition, Blut Aus Nord

TOM O'BOYLE

RESURRECTIONS

Unearthing the latest metal reissues

Death Angel seek out their deepest cuts

A LIVE ALBUM with a twist, **DEATH ANGEL**'s *The Bastard Tracks* (Nuclear Blast) **[8]** was recorded at San Francisco's Great American Music Hall earlier this year, and captures the Bay Area legends as they pummel through a set of rarely performed deep cuts. Despite the absence of a crowd, the whole thing rattles along with demented energy. Everything from fiery kick-off *Lord Of Hate* to a rambunctious reading of Black Sabbath's *Falling Off The Edge Of The World* hits the target and Death Angel are somehow even easier to love.

BORKNAGAR's debut album first surfaced 25 years ago, giving only subtle hints that the Bergen crew would go on to be one of their country's most wildly creative bands. Newly re-tweaked for anniversary purposes, *Borknagar* (Century Media) **[7]** remains an invigorating storm of windswept pagan extremity, now augmented with a large quantity of bonus material.

Before hardcore became a perennial Trojan horse for whiny alt-rock, bands like **EARTH CRISIS**, **STRIFE** and **SNAPCASE** were flying the flag for the real, bruising thing. Recorded early in 2020, *The Return Of The California Takeover* (WAR) **[8]** captures all three bands, as they relived the rowdiness of the original *The California Takeover... Live* album from 1996. Age plainly has not withered any of them, and Earth Crisis, in particular, are still fucking terrifying.

Fans of Venom, Midnight and Toxic Holocaust may already know about Japanese thrash icons **SACRIFICE**, but a 30th anniversary vinyl reissue for their second album, *Total Steel* (Relics From The Crypt) **[7]**, provides a gripping and gritty entry point either way. Fast, furious and filthy to the bone, songs like oddly named opener *Clumsy Life* and *Fight To Be Free* haven't aged a bit and *will* smash your face in. After that, a remastered rebirth for **GREEN CARNATION**'s *The Acoustic Verses* (Season Of Mist) **[8]** may be the perfect, soothing antidote. The Norwegian band's most overtly prog-friendly release, it peaks with the spellbinding sprawl of *9-29-045*. Pure magic, strummed into life by experts.

DOM LAWSON

PRESS X2

LIVE REVIEWS

SLIPKNOT

KILLSWITCH ENGAGE/FEVER 333/CODE ORANGE/VENDED

BANC OF CALIFORNIA STADIUM, LOS ANGELES

Iowa's masked icons bring their wrecking ball to Tinseltown

PICTURE THE SCENE: it's 1999. You're at Ozzfest. It's early in the day at the second stage, and you've just seen Puya – a salsa-loving Cuban prog band – and some industrial also-rans called Apartment 26. Then, nine masked men in boiler suits storm out, armed with the harshest nu metal you've ever heard. One of them is a pig. That one has nails sticking out of his head. That other one's jerking his nose off. They've huffed a dead crow to prepare for the show and the singer has a penchant for catching fire in front of crowds. Slipknot rattled the entire metal world with their intensity, their incendiary live shows the first step on their ascent to superstardom.

Twenty years later, The Nine have transformed from the mob that will steal your show to custodians of their own festival. The 2021 edition of Knotfest is especially big-league, hosted amidst the glitz and glamour of Los Angeles. Six bands have descended on the Banc Of California Stadium, with four of the supports (Bring Me The Horizon not included) streaming portions of their set before a full-length main event.

VENDED are fronted by Corey Taylor's son, Griffin, while Clown's son, Simon Crahan, mans the drums – and they are playing a stadium show off the back of one EP. You can almost hear teeth grinding over the nepotism. Their model is the same as their parents' as well, with chaotically catchy choruses occasionally escaping from a nu metal riot. They perform with clear conviction, but the shadow of Slipknot still looms darkly.

CODE ORANGE declare, "If you know us, you know we do not bend!" We know them. We agree. The metal/industrial/punk/insert-genre-here battering of 2020's *Underneath* affirmed this rabble as unyielding originals, and tonight only furthers that reputation. *Swallowing The Rabbit Whole* jolts from hardcore beatdowns to spoken-word gloom, before the gang-vocal refrain of *Last Ones Left* is built around

the chants of an invigorated crowd. Frontman Jami Morgan is boundless in his aggression, shouting at his audience so intently between tracks that he seems ready to fist-fight every one of them.

The bar's been raised to stratospheric heights and **FEVER 333** almost reach it. Jason Aalon Butler emerges in a boiler suit decorated like police garb and smashes his mic stand, setting the precedent for a show that's as volatile as it is sociopolitical. Strength in numbers is an all-consuming theme, from the hip hop intro of *One Of Us* (*'Fuck your lies and fuck your greed; we are the majority'*) to speeches about the inclusion of women and POC in metal culture. However, more flooring is the incessant energy. By the end of finale *Hunting Season*, Jason's darted across the stage countless times, stripped to his boxers and even skateboarded across other bands' gear.

"Everyone that's standing around doing jackshit, take your thumb out of your fucking asshole, look to the person next to you, shove it up their fucking asshole and open up the goddamn pit!" Adam D's mouth is in fine form this evening, as are the rest of **KILLSWITCH ENGAGE**. Anyone who's paid attention to Stateside metal in the 2000s already knows what they're in for: screeching guitar leads, pummelling verses and choruses with hooks enormous enough to catch a great white. All three are peddled gladly, with the PMA voiced by *Strength Of The Mind* and *Us Against The World* only furthering the aura of triumph.

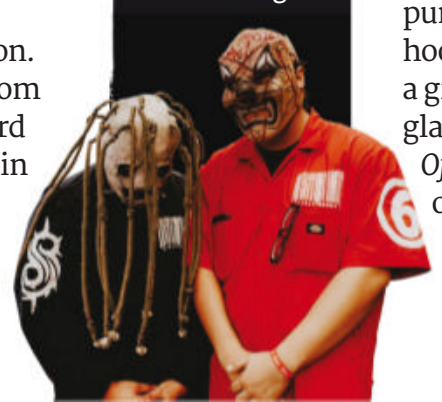
THE SET

SLIPKNOT

Unsainted
Disasterpiece
Nero Forte
Before I Forget
The Heretic Anthem
Psychosocial
The Devil In I
The Chapeltown Rag
Wait And Bleed
Vermilion
All Out Life
Duality
Spit It Out

ENCORE

People = Shit
(sic)
Surfacing



In their rise from terrifying upstarts to American metal institution, **SLIPKNOT** have traded piss and vinegar for theatricality and a setlist cherrypicked from six lauded albums. They're donning some new threads tonight, too; Corey's *We Are Not Your Kind* mask, which looked like a bloated face wrapped in clingfilm, gets a skeletal replacement, while drummer Jay Weinberg resembles a melted Jason Voorhees.

2019 cut *Unsainted* opens, showcasing the maturer 'Knot's adoration for slick guitar leads and arena rock choruses, before *Disasterpiece* lurches back to *Iowa*'s pissed-off onslaught. *"I wanna slit your throat and fuck the wound!"* the Great Big Mouth howls: a throwback to the wrath of yore, starkly contrasted by the bright lights and LED screens backing the band today. *The Devil In I* maximises the stadium pomp as fireballs explode from Alessandro Venturella's bass – thankfully without immolating a single person in the pit.

Corey even seems to be in – dare we say it – a good mood. "Welcome to a dream come true," he states in the preamble for *Nero Forte*, before calling the 22,000 Maggots in front of him his "family" throughout the night. Almost certainly contributing to such euphoria is that he gets to debut a new song, *The Chapeltown Rag*, as the world watches. Predominantly, it's Slipknot being Slipknot, assaulting with growls and a three-percussionist barrage, although that black metal pre-chorus – blastbeating and tremolo picking – demands replays.

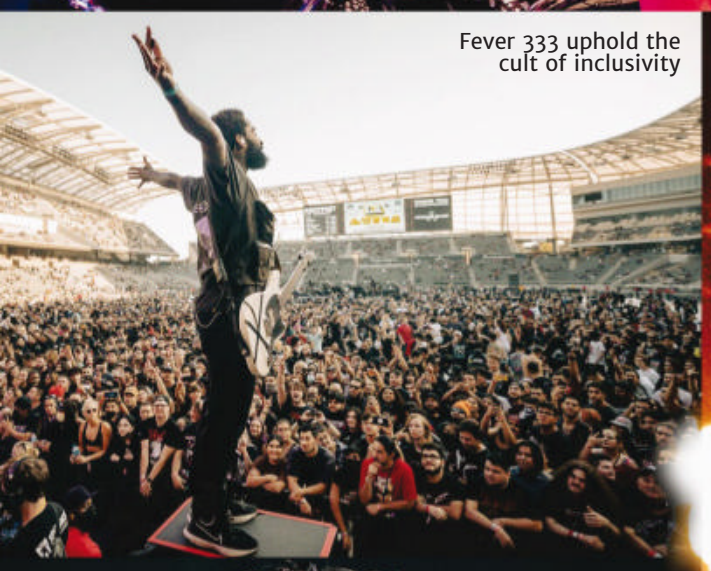
Knotfest closes with the expected torrent of hits; *Duality, Spit It Out, People = Shit, (sic)* and *Surfacing* in succession demonstrate that, amidst the fury, Slipknot have always been immaculate hook-writers. With the days of sniffing carcasses and puking in their own masks gone, it's this that's ensured their survival: a perfect marriage of infectiousness and aggro.

MATT MILLS

KEVIN GARCIA/KDG MEDIA LLC PICTURES: STEVE THRASHER

Slipknot raise the temperature to boiling point

Vended: they scrub up well



Fever 333 uphold the cult of inclusivity

Corey Taylor's new mask will blow minds

Killswitch unleash some PM fucking A

Code Orange: Reba Meyers hits a high note

DAMNATION FESTIVAL 2021

LEEDS UNIVERSITY UNION, LEEDS

Carcass, Paradise Lost and Svalbard bring extremity back to the Midlands

AFTER THE DISORIENTATION of the past two years, Damnation is both saviour and intensification, the UK's first extreme-devoted festival to return hosting a tangible air of excitement as metalheads reunite and try to remember how to navigate the venue's labyrinthine, four-stage interior. Leeds natives **CRYPTIC SHIFT** aren't much help, their dirty death metal space opera proving pretty highbrow for the opening act, as their meandering squall proves high on prog brutality, low on engagement for some. **MOUNTAIN CALLER**'s post-metal-meets-doom-and-stoner sound sets an adventurous tone for the day, bassist El Reeve sharing an anecdote involving cockroaches, mazes and performance anxiety that's every bit as bizarre as it sounds.

Even with an extremely limited view of the fourth stage, the inherent theatricality behind **ABDUCTION**'s venomous take on black metal makes for a visceral experience. **BOSS KELOID**'s joy at returning to the stage for the first time in two years is more than reflected back at them by a riff-worshipping legion in awe of their airtight, good-time psych-prog stomp. **EVILE**'s killer arsenal of classic-style thrash anthems are perfectly suited to festivals. *Thrasher, We Who Are About To Die, Paralysed* and *Gore* are perfect headbangers and mosh-starters: affirmation of Evile's status as British thrash's great hope. The continued presence of blow-ups sharks, beach balls and hammers for **MAN MUST DIE**'s set comes as fallout from the carnage of 'party slam' goofballs **PARTY CANNON**. MMD frontman Joe McGlynn insists the crowd "get in there and fuck shit up… but nicely, like." "Don't hurt the shark," he warns, "or I'll get PETA on you."

Featuring ex-members of Hang The Bastard, London three-piece **URNE** take the stage a little late and with a little too much kick drum. Although these metalcore-laced genre-hoppers seem a little out of place on the predominantly black metal fourth stage, the crowd laps up every Killswitch-inspired chorus and Mastodon-influenced riff. **DVNE** get the packed-out third stage lurching in meditative unison – from thick, spacey grooves to soft, melodic passages, the Scots' intricate post-metal marks them out as an exciting prospect. **BOSSK** serve up more post-metal on the main stage – a seriously trippy, meditative experience played against a backdrop of stars and planets that makes their whole set feel like a journey through outer space.

Back deep in the bowels of the building, **VIDEO NASTIES** explode onto the fourth stage, their horror-fuelled black'n'roll erupting through the crowd. Lurking behind a green fog, frontman Damian Von Talbot is a shirtless, glove-garbed maniac with a Charles Manson-like hold over his frenzied followers. It's certifiable fun. **GAMA BOMB**'s spectacularly suited frontman Philly Byrne coordinates a perma-flaying pit on the third stage – the falsetto conductor in their circus of good-natured golden-era thrash mania.

SVALBARD are a last-minute replacement for Green Lung, and the sheer bluster of *Unpaid Intern* and *Open Wound* make for a caustically emotional, thrilling experience. **ONSLAUGHT** quickly shake off a small technical issue as the legendary thrashers stir up a chaotic pit on the main stage with a stream of crowd-pleaser tracks. Despite the queue to see **WODE**, the acrid black metallers' slow burn gradually begins to seethe during a workmanlike fouth stage set lacking in atmosphere. Norway's **SYLVAINE** have their own issues on the third stage, but technical troubles be damned – with the entrancing Kathrine Shepard leading the charge, the band's wistful blackgaze bathed under blue lights holds the audience enraptured.

The impact of **GODFLESH**'s influential industrial beat-loop machinations depends upon your proximity. At the back, the repetition proves disengaging, but in the thick of devotees enrapt in the hypnotic pound, it's the essence of what makes them captivating. Plagued by more sound troubles that delay them for 20 minutes, **WINTERFYLLETH** play to a thirsty, sweaty and impatient rabble of black-clad devotees jammed into every crevice of the fourth stages's bar. Once they get going, the Mancunian black metallers put on a fiercely exultant display worthy of UKBM scene leaders. **CONAN** unleash their abysmal, unrelenting doom heft to a sweaty horde on the third stage, their crushing riffage and thunderous tones trembling pints of beer like the strides of an incoming *Jurassic Park* T-Rex. **REGARDE LES HOMMES TOMBER**'S frontman ditches his cowl after a few songs, but there's no such indecision to their upward-spiralling blackened rites, as if Schammasch had begun from hardcore roots.

The fourth stage is heaving yet again, with the rip-roaring bellows of James McBain's **HELLRIPPER**. The Scottish band's catchy blackened speed metal channels the scuzz of Venom and the furiousness of Destroyer 666 in a similar vain to Midnight. They might not break any boundaries but the fast-paced grooves ignite a spark within the crowd. Damnation's always a homecoming for **PARADISE LOST**, proudly proclaiming their Huddersfield heritage as they celebrate 30 years of their doom-death-defining *Gothic* album by playing the record in its heart-racing-in-molasses entirety before an as ever devout congregation.

MEMORIAM attract the older heads, gleefully reliving frontman Karl Willett's Bolt Thrower glory days. He acknowledges the current strength of underground British extremity, providing a nostalgic closing set as one of the scene's progenitors and paying tribute to the late, legendary metal journalist, Malcolm Dome. **YEAR OF NO LIGHT**'s sprawling, explorative, instrumental post-metal sends the whole room into a mesmeric trance; perhaps not the best way to get pumped up for the headliners – unless you're off to see Esoteric instead – but a soothing, cathartic release nonetheless.

If you can get past Greg Chandler's Britney mic, **ESOTERIC** themselves will send your Damnation experience spinning out to the far reaches of the underverse, their reverb-erating cosmic doom sounding like the woe of an ancient entity who got left behind by the Big Bang. With so much ground to cover, words are few and far between during **CARCASS**'s set, but when you've got *Buried Dreams, Black Star* and *Heartwork* in the vault mere banter feels trite. Appropriately, they take to the set with a sense of surgical efficiency, each beat, snarl and howl measured to ensure utter bedlam erupts, a fittingly epic close to a celebration of the underground and extreme metal arts.

HANNAH MAY KILROY/RICH HOBSON/TOM O'BOYLE
ALICE PATTILLO/JONATHAN SELZER

Evile meet the thrash shark head on.

SABRINA RAMDOYAL

Onslaught still live up to their name after 39 years

Sylvaine gets rapt up in a rhapsody

Svalard's Serena Cherry carries the UK metal flame

Jeff Walker unleashes Carcass's finest cuts

Regarde Les Hommes Tomber: quelle mystique!

18+

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Dani Filth plays a few too many nights before Christmas

CRADLE OF FILTH

THE ROUNDHOUSE, LONDON

Suffolk's morbid metallers celebrate three decades in decadent style

ONLY TWO LIVING things could survive a nuclear holocaust: cockroaches and Cradle Of Filth. 2021 marks the 30th anniversary of Dani Filth's cabaret and those three decades have pelted them with slight after slight. Repeatedly, they've been lambasted as "gimmicky" and "black metal posers", yet victorious they stand. Not only have the band endured; they're thriving off the back of their best album in 20 years, *Existence Is Futile*, which gets a release show before a packed Roundhouse on Halloween.

Ghosts, goblins and ghouls are being idolised worldwide tonight, and Cradle's ghastly symphonia manifests that spirit. They materialise before a Hieronymus Boschian hellscape of a backdrop, strings and choirs swelling with typical bombast. New clean singer Anabelle Iratni announces herself with a soaring aria before the ceremony plunges into *Existential Terror*.

The opener hybridises heaviness and orchestral pomp like only its creators can. Dani's rants shoot off the backing choirs, while rolling riffs and galloping drums make for a joyously morose romp, equal parts black metal, death metal and NWOBHM. *Blackest Magick In Practice* and *Nymphetamine (Fix)* follow, juxtaposing the band at their most brutish against a goth rock opera.

Staying true to the precedent of that triptych, Cradle rampage through a crammed setlist. *Crawling King Chaos* and *Us, Dark, Invincible* resurrect the cult of the new, before the latter half plumbs the depths of their discography. A big surprise is reappropriated Iron Maiden titan *Hallowed Be Thy Name*; although musically loyal to the grandeur of the original, its replacement of Bruce Dickinson's air-raid-siren blare with unintelligible squawks encapsulates why this ensemble have been so controversial for so long.

Ashok clearly hasn't heard any pins drop

A set of such scope condensed into barely 90 minutes leaves little time for Dani to interact with his audience. However, select pearls do emerge, predominantly when Suffolk's greatest icon answers chants of "Cradle! Cradle!" with a counter-refrain of "Anal! Anal!" Much like his music, it's knowingly, deliciously silly.

Truly, the spooky season has heralded Cradle Of Filth in excelsis. They're cartoonishly kitsch, sure, but this extravaganza off the back of a career opus affirms that they deserve to be taken seriously.

MATT MILLS

JAMES SHARROCK

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A NIGHT OF SALVATION

LEEDS UNIVERSITY UNION, LEEDS

Orange Goblin and Raging Speedhorn get the Damnation party started

IT TELLS YOU just how special Damnation's simultaneously streamed pre-festival party, A Night Of Salvation, is, that re-suited Satanic legends **AKERCOCKE** are the opening band. Playing 2001's *Goat Of Mendes* in full, the band arrive amidst a hail of screeches and frenzied blasts not unlike witnessing the effects of angering a vengeful hornet god, later accentuated when the band bring out Hecate Enthroned's Dean Seddon for *The Serpent*. Punishing as their most brutal elements are, Akercocke's arcane melodies still utterly enthral, the interplay feeling like abjection set to a blastbeat as each howl threatens to tear a hole in the metaphysical plane.

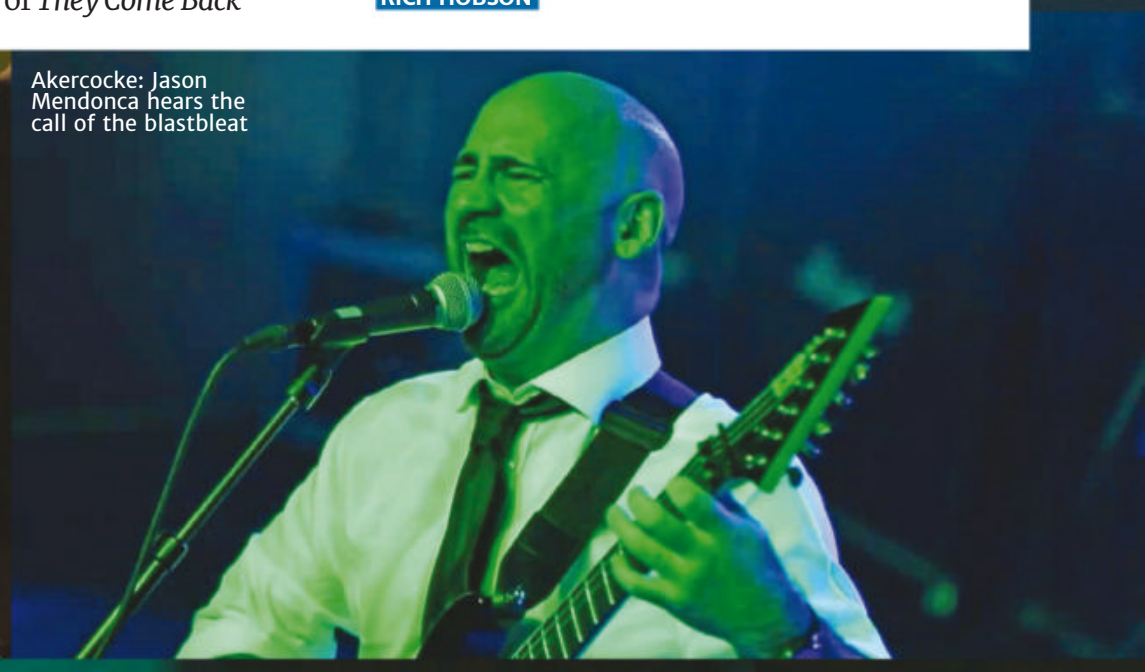
SVALBARD's soaring post-hardcore melodies bring a natural sense of emotional release that isn't lost on the band themselves. "I've got tears in my eyes already," says vocalist Serena Cherry after enormous opener *Open Wound*. Hearing the full *When I Die, Will I Get Better?* album only highlights how much of an evolutionary leap Svalbard took with their latest release, its sublime guitar melodies and throat-shredding vocals perfectly suited to uplift and inspire audiences after 18 months of uncertainty and hardship.

A full career-spanning set from **ORANGE GOBLIN** just goes to prove how unassailable they are when it comes to assessing the UK's most criminally underrated groups. The Sabbathian groove of early cuts like *Saruman's Wish* gives way to harder and heavier cuts as the set progresses, the band going full Motörhead by the time *The Devil's Whip* rolls around. With the likes of *They Come Back (Harvest Of Skulls)*, *Red Tide Rising* and *Sons Of Salem* all coming towards the latter-half of the set, it's fair to say OG aren't losing any potency as the years wear on.

RAGING SPEEDHORN bring things home with a seismic serving of hardcore-inflected sludge. Like Crowbar decided to get more aggro Hatebreed-style, Speedhorn bring a physicality that reminds why they headlined the very first Damnation back in 2005. Through it all is a droll sense of humour; from repeating the same tar-thick riff a dozen times to end a track to vocalist Frank Regan switching onto drums at one point, Speedhorn bring a brilliant sense of anarchy that really does sell their closing line: "We're Raging Speedhorn and we don't give a fuck."

RICH HOBSON

Raging Speedhorn don't stiff on the riffs



Akercocke: Jason Mendonca hears the call of the blastbleat

Orange Goblin: this one, they win

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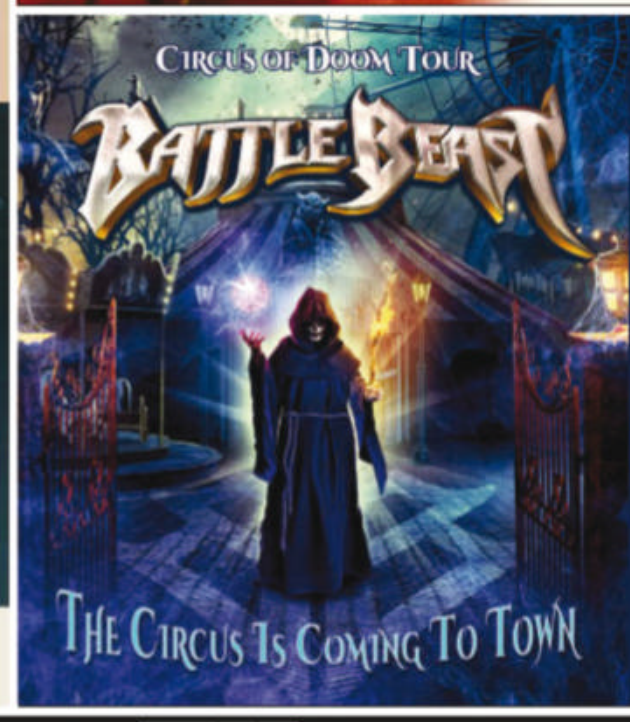

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Rolo Tomassi: mythic and monolithic

ROLO TOMASSI

DEVIL SOLD HIS SOUL

CHALK, BRIGHTON

Sheffield's mathcore commandos return to rev up their maelstrom

ROLO TOMASSI ARE a special band. Few are able to marry the chaotic, mathcore frenzy of The Dillinger Escape Plan with the mellifluous, cinematic ambience of Clint Mansell so seamlessly and with such clarity of vision. The Sheffield five-piece have been pursuing and refining their singular sound the past 16 years, and this evening's Brighton show marks the first chance for fans to hear material from their forthcoming sixth studio album, *Where Myth Becomes Memory* live.

As a bonus, they've brought along London post-hardcore sextet, **DEVIL SOLD HIS SOUL** – a band who've been plying their trade for longer than the headliners. They're neither as progressive nor as forward-thinking, but *An Ocean Of Lights* fills the cavernous venue with a wave of digital distortion that feels paradoxically heavy and soothing. Around half the set comes from this year's career-best album, *Loss*, but while DSHD provide an entertaining distraction, tonight really is all about one band only.

Anticipation reaches fever pitch during an ominous, tension-building intro before **ROLO TOMASSI** emerge one by one to a heroes' welcome. They burst straight into the colossal, doom-laden *Cloaked*, one of three songs played this evening taken from *Where Myth Becomes Memory* and the crowd erupt, greeting it as a setlist staple rather than the song's live debut. The band are incredibly tight and precise, even more astonishing given that this is their first show in more than two years. You wouldn't know it, given the sheer confidence and precision with which they attack their set, predominantly culled from their last two albums, *Time Will Die And Love Will Bury It* and *Grievances*.

Of the other two new songs debuted tonight, *Closer* is an uplifting, ethereal piano-led number, showcasing vocalist Eva Korman's ever-more-confident clean vocals, and *Drip* is a monolithic apocalyptic maelstrom. If Skynet need a new anthem for destroying the human race, then surely this is it. Rolo Tomassi are one of the UK's most exceptional bands, and based on tonight's performance, they're only just beginning to hit their stride.

REMFRY DEDMAN

BORSTAL

THE BLACK HEART, CAMDEN

Gigs have been back a while now, but this is an essential reminder that, even though we're glad to see live music in any form, sat down and socially distanced isn't the ideal way to experience certain genres. Borstal would lose quite a lot of their potency were it not for the enthusiastic and boisterous following that's packed The Black Heart this evening. Punk and hardcore in all forms need to exist in and amongst their people, and with both fans and band 'mingling' together both onstage and off during a chaotic set, this is a frantic and essential reminder of just how powerful this music can be in the live setting. There really isn't anything new that Borstal are bringing to the table musically, but this supergroup, containing members of UKHC royalty Knuckledust, Dripback and extreme metal drumming legend Nick Barker, have mixed beatdown hardcore, old-school punk and Oi! to create a sound that's both totally familiar and timeless. Frontman Pierre Mendivil is a fantastic director of disorder, barking in people's faces with a massive shite-snaffling grin on his face during the songs and then turning into a highly entertaining, smooth-talking gentleman when addressing the crowd in between. Great, manic fun, just like the old days.

STEPHEN HILL

WINTERFYLLETH
DREAD SOVEREIGN

CLWB IFOR BACH, CARDIFF

Given he hasn't visited Wales with Primordial for over 20 years, the initial lack of a heroic welcome afforded to **DREAD SOVEREIGN** leaves vocalist and bassist Alan Averill with a point to prove. It adds fire to the doom trio's already-spirited rumble, with the climax of every song seeing the appreciation growing ever greater. Even the brave decision to close with their own take on Black Sabbath's namesake song pays off. Given their reputation as one of UK black metal's most consistently intense spectacles, it was concerning that **WINTERFYLLETH**'s final pre-pandemic run lacked the customary zeal. But armed with a clutch of songs from last year's *The Reckoning Dawn* and new guitarist Russell Dobson in tow, that fervent spirit has been pleasingly restored. The latest offerings hold their own alongside the breathless vista of *Whisper Of The Elements* and *A Valley Thick With Oaks*, with the latter's closing refrain considerately changed to *'In the heart of every Welshman'*. An amusing admittance of the band's early musical limitations introduces two songs from debut *The Ghost Of Heritage*, while the small but vocal crowd in are in fine voice right up until the last notes of a towering *Ensigns Of Victory*.

ADAM REES

KEVIN NIXON

Matt Tuck seals Bullet's status as giants of the UK metal scene

BULLET FOR MY VALENTINE

TESSERACT/BLEED FROM WITHIN

MOTORPOINT ARENA, CARDIFF

Bridgend's resurgent metallers host a crowd-enrapturing homecoming

THE COLLECTIVE AGREEMENT online about this tour could be boiled down to the following: 'This show was very good, please go see it if you can.' Given that **BLEED FROM WITHIN** are opening and cannot put a foot wrong right now, this summary already has legs. The Scottish metalcore bruisers are crushing every stage they step on with the same power that latest album *Fracture* did to umpteen eardrums, and tonight is no exception. Commanding the room with ease, inciting pits from the off and getting a huge singalong for closer *The End Of All We Know*, they're in danger of outgrowing their headliner tour venues before they've even performed in them.

TESSERACT are, to be fair, the sore thumb on this bill. They're no less heavy, of course, but their technical prog metal is certainly some distance away from their tourmates in terms of vibe. The notoriously finicky arena sound decides to make itself known as well, parts 2 and 3 of *Concealing Fate* suffering from a muddying and a lack of distinction. That said, when everything behaves itself, the band do nothing but soar. An expansive conglomerate of riffs, soundscapes and intricate passages shoot around the room as the likes of *Of Mind – Nocturne* and *Orbital* cause havoc on the arena floor. Sore thumb? Maybe. New fans made tonight? Certainly.

If the jury has often been out on **BULLET FOR MY VALENTINE**'s studio creations, opinions on their seventh, self-titled album have been rallying around the idea that the Welsh metallers are undergoing a renaissance. However, what the world may think of them has no bearing on tonight because, in the nation that birthed them, they're on an absolute tear. Despite being less than 48 hours old, the new material is sung loud and proud by a rabid home crowd and the delivery of each song is just as impressive, especially the drop in *Shatter*, which threatens to blow the roof off. Elsewhere, *4 Words (To Choke Upon)* and *The Last Fight* are performed so fast they're nearly in the key of thrash and, more than 15 years later, *Tears Don't Fall* still remains one of the biggest modern metal anthems. However realistic the notion of Bullet headlining a main edition of Download may be, the way they play tonight make it clear that very few bands could have followed and outperformed them. Diolch yr fawr, boys!

ELLIOT LEAVER

DUNCAN EVERSON

BÖMBERS

THE BLACK HEART, LONDON

Abbath's Motörhead tribute trio finally ignites in London

THE SCENE ALMOST looks like it's being played on a loop – people enter The Black Heart's upstairs venue, look to their right and then do a sudden mental readjustment as they see a man sporting a Snaggletooth baseball cap and a semi-Lemmy handlebar moustache standing calmly next to the merch stall. Wait – that's – is that – that's Abbath! Uh, hi? To be fair, part of the shock, is down to the final confirmation that This. Is. Actually. Happening. Tonight's event – Abbath paying tribute to Motörhead with his long-running, if rarely seen covers band, Bömbers – has been repeatedly postponed over the past three years, down to a drone appearing over Heathrow on the one day he was supposed to fly over and COVID, of course, and the slight sense of unreality at the thought of black metal's most memorable, and mercurial, showman rocking up to a 150-capacity venue remains.

By the time they're ready to take the stage, the room is packed and expectation is at tinderbox-level fever pitch. If Abbath himself is, given the occasion, not in his full-on exhibitionist entertainer mode, high-spirited wingman guitarist and ex-Old Funeral bandmate Tore Bratseth leads the line, but as soon as they acknowledge the long wait that's led up to tonight and launch into the barbed riff and pulsing groove of *Bomber*, all hell kicks off as pent-up, post-lockdown energy, relief and the sheer thrill of witnessing primal, DNA-imprinted power being channelled with all its spirit intact combust.

Abbath's Lemmy rasp into his overhanging mic is spot-on, too, as inseparable from the figure in front of us as his trademark black metal croak. Throughout *No Class*, *Killed By Death* and *Orgasmatron*, the vibe in the room is somewhere between heaving punk squat gig and ecstatic cult celebration as "Lem-my! Lem-my!" chants ring out.

The closing trio, the inevitable *Ace Of Spades*, *Rock 'n' Roll* and *Overkill* don't feel like Motörhead revisited, but timeless yet in-the-moment eruptions, and the unbridled chaos that greets them becomes, on all levels, a much-needed act of reorientation.

JONATHAN SELZER

Abbath has the Motörhead spirit in spades

Bömbers' Tore Bratseth ladles on the philth

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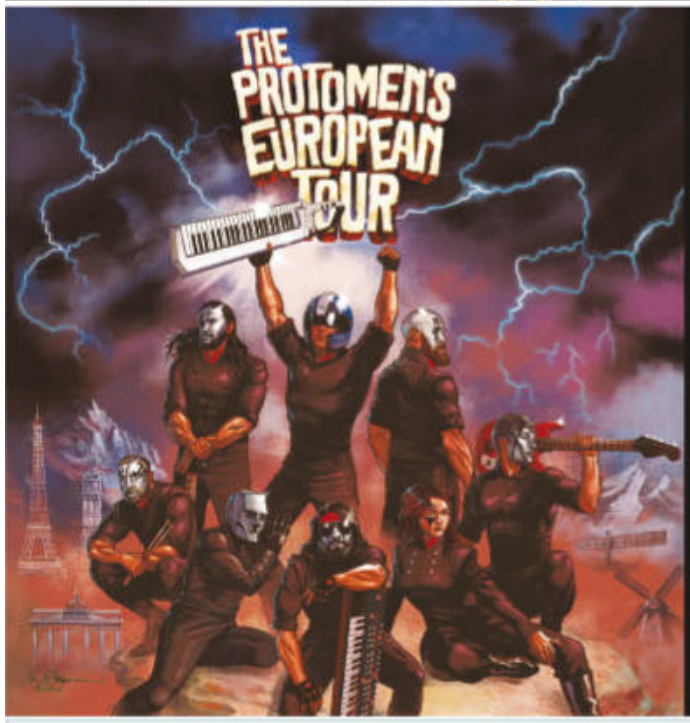

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FIVE MINUTES WITH JOHANNES ECKERSTRÖM AVATAR

Metal's court jester on where Black Sabbath went wrong and why he's the Devil incarnate

WORDS: MATT MILLS

You have a podcast with your wife where you do the odd interview. How often are you being interviewed by a journalist and think, "I could do a better job of this"?
"It's scary how often that is. I can have nice conversations with wonderful people and sometimes we'll click, because we'll talk about something we both give a damn about. That being said, there are a lot of times where I get a question and I go, 'I'm just gonna answer this question I made up in my head.'"

You tweeted that the Abba reunion is better than the Black Sabbath one. Why would you say something so controversial yet so brave?
"Yet so true! I am a bigger Black Sabbath fan than Abba fan, but I felt that the Sabbath stuff with Rick Rubin [who produced their final album, *13*] ended up being kinda contrived. I think Rick told them to pretend that they're 25 and that doesn't work. It didn't have that energy and it didn't transform into something else. Abba, with this new album [*Voyage*], there's a song where I go, 'This is divorce disco!' Ha ha ha! These are songs by people in that age bracket, with the life experiences of that age bracket. To have a reunion in your 70s, you have to make that mean something. Sabbath dropped the ball."

You've released three standalone singles this year: a death metal song called *Barren Cloth Mother*, melodic rocker *Going Hunting* and the acoustic *So Sang The Hollow*. Is this you lot flexing and showing off your diversity?
"Ha! That multifaceted thing is a huge part of what we're doing. It's the Queen/Beatles approach of multiple songwriters who can do whatever but it sounds like you because of your DNA. It's not a conscious flex."

A little birdie told us that two new singles will be coming on New Year's Day…
"I think one's coming before that.

"I REALISED THE OTHER DAY THAT I AM SATAN"

By the time this interview comes out, provided no one's fucked up insanely, you'll also have heard *Construction Of Souls*. There's one more after that."

Where does *Construction Of Souls* fit in with the rest of the singles? What's its identity?
"The main identity of it is [hums riff]. Good luck putting that in print. This is a proper heavy metal song. It's a bulldozer of a song. Thematically, it's almost a Christmas song, inspired by discussions we've had in the band about the next step in evolution being that we should just hand the keys over to the robots."

That sounds Christmassy.
"Well, they're a bunch of robots building shit. From that to elves building shit, the step is very short."

And what about that next single?
"*Construction Of Souls* is about all the humans dying and the robots taking over, so it's kind of a lighthearted song. With – ah, I almost gave you the title! With, umm, 'Song X', it's about depravity and perversion. Where's the line between pain and pleasure? Sometimes there isn't one. It'll be the perfect way to start the new year."

What's your New Year's Resolution?
"I want to continue my 13km runs. Runners' high is like meditation. I realised the other day that I am Satan."

How are you Satan, Johannes?
"The more things I attribute to the symbol of Satan, and then I see what kind of force I want to be in the world and what kind of forces I see as harmful, I think, 'OK!' There's not a guy with a halo above or a guy with horns below; it's only us here and whatever we attribute to ourselves, so suddenly I felt strongly that, to the extent that that winged creature exists, I am that."

You mentioned earlier that, if you don't like a question, you'll answer one of your own. We've gone from New Year's Resolutions to Satan…
"Exactly! I steer things to what I find important. Ha ha!" H

***BARREN CLOTH MOTHER*, *SO SANG THE HOLLOW* AND *GOING HUNTING* ARE STREAMING NOW. AVATAR TOUR THE UK IN JANUARY**

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